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Knitting rebellion: Elizabeth Zimmermann, identity, and craftsmanship in post war America

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For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Date

KNITTING REBELLION: ELIZABETH ZIMMERMANN, IDENTITY, AND
CRAFTSMANSHIP IN POST WAR AMERICA

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

of

Purdue University

by

Maureen Lilly Marsh

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

of

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2016

Purdue University

West Lafayette, Indiana

For my husband, Michael, and my daughters, Anna, and Kathryn;

And

for the men and women who are fusing their own unique blends of professionalism,
domesticity, and creativity every day in their maker's practices.

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ABSTRACT

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At mid 20th century, hand knitting in the United States was practiced as a minor and fading chore of the domestic economy, with decreasing pattern publications in national women's magazines, and the demise of *Vogue Knitting Book* by the late nineteen-sixties. By 1990, it had rebounded into major new publications in periodicals and books, new and revived artisanship practices, gallery exhibitions and major international conferences and gatherings. A driving figure in this resurgence was the knitter, writer, teacher, designer, and publisher Elizabeth Zimmermann. With her initial publication in 1955 up to her retirement in 1989, Elizabeth's philosophy of knitting stressed each knitter as an independent craftsman responsible for material and design choices, in opposition to the uncritical, or "blind follower" of the patterns knitter of the knitting industry publications. This shift in the practices of knitting intersected with increasing feminine autonomy and increasing interest in fiber arts to shape a new identity of 'the knitter' as original and self-determining craftsman, rather than the mere producer-reproducer of knit objects for domestic consumption. Building on both Sandra Alfoldy's cultural/craft history work in *Crafting Identity* (2005) and on Holland and Lave's cultural

studies work in *History in Person: Enduring Struggles, Contentious Practices, Intimate Identities* (2001), and on a significant archive of contemporary book and periodical publishing, as well as the collection of Elizabeth Zimmermann's papers at Schoolhouse Press, Pittsville, Wisconsin, my work traces an evolving popular craft process as identity formation and cultural production.

INTRODUCTION

My work in excavating and analyzing transformations in American hand knitting in the post-war twentieth century is part of the reconsideration of the full range of women's lives in post war American culture. My focus on a previously under-noticed domestic practice through the lens and archive of Elizabeth Zimmermann, a significant designer, writer, teacher, and publisher, offers multiple new angles on significant scholarly concerns around identity and agency in contemporary women in their movement across previously firmer social and cultural boundaries. In looking at hand knitting women, I am examining the effect of shifting identity and increasing agency within a dissolving boundary of domesticity. James Livingstone, among others, has cited the utter dissolution of that boundary between public and private, first articulated and claimed by the contemporary feminist movement, as in fact a crucial aspect of the entire cultural landscape of the period.¹ The art historian, Elissa Auther examined this dissolving boundary among creative individuals whose cultural productivity could no longer be easily categorized as 'art' or 'politics' but contained significant elements of both in a new identity-altering fusion of creative practice, politics, and personal life in her text *West of Center: Art and the Counterculture*.² A great deal of valuable investigation

¹ James Livingstone, *The World Turned Inside Out: American Thought and Culture at the end of the Twentieth Century*. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, Inc. 2010).

² Elissa Auther, *West of Center: Art and the Counterculture, 1965-1977*. (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

has occurred in the previously public sides of American culture as that boundary dissolved and women, people of color, and other marginalized populations moved into major social and cultural arenas such as politics, economics and education. My work, in looking at the changing practices and emerging communities of contemporary hand knitting, examines a previously private side of the boundary as it negotiated those same profound social and cultural shifts of the period.

Hand knitting as an archive ripe for investigation in this period offers a rewarding view. It challenges the narrative of extreme division between feminist and conservative American women by offering a nuanced view of women engaged in an apparently conservative practice of domesticity but moving increasingly, and even radically, towards increased public and private autonomy with regard to that practice. Knitters who had previously knit in private, for family use and with little knitting community beyond immediate friends and family, blossomed into professional designers and writers, and members of a new knitting community that encompassed new business ventures, new publications, and new physical and virtual communities that themselves productively blurred the divide between personal and professional identities of craftsmanship. In this transformation around hand knitting, we can view the shift of a form of craft that had been largely reproductive of commercially produced forms, and reactive to the dictates of fashion and class, towards a far more self-expressive and self-directed form of cultural production. Knitters began to shift from mere commercially produced pattern followers towards designing original products, demanding of alternative techniques and materials, and taking up authoritative positions in opposition to traditional industry and commercial voices. The commercial representation of knitting as narrowly productive of fashionable

functionality shifted towards a far more heteroglossic community of knitters speaking for themselves and to each other, across a broader variety of class and geography, with multiple schools of knitting practice in the rediscovery of historical and ethnic practices and design, and the production of new and revived materials and techniques.

Elizabeth Zimmerman is an especially advantageous individual lens through which to make this examination. A prolific writer, a highly sought after teacher, a designer across multiple traditional and innovative venues, an extremely knowledgeable commercial vendor of books and materials, and, eventually, a publisher herself, Elizabeth exercised an extraordinary influence across the practice of knitting, with a finger in nearly every possible knitting pie over a period of several decades. Her publication record of regular periodical publication from 1957 through 1989, as well as four books published in her lifetime, can only be described as extensive, and inclusive not only of her technical knowledge and designs but also of her thinking around knitting as a creative personal practice. She was an energetic and hugely influential teacher of knitting, opening up new audiences in television and in the home video market, and teaching in person at yarn shops and conferences across the United States, Canada, and New Zealand. Her designs, and her writing about the design process, were highly innovative in their invitation and exhortation to the ordinary knitter to exercise originality in creative work. These designs and her encouragement led to a widespread and enthusiastic response on the part of her audience, much of it archived in the form of copious fan mail and print coverage. Perhaps most remarkably, Elizabeth's archive illuminates a successful traditional design career at the very moment when she was also radically re-inventing the very identity and practice of the professional knitting designer. Yet she was also a

commercial vendor whose knowledge of high quality materials and publications, as well as the cultural variations of commercial and personal knitting practice and technique ranged across North America, the United Kingdom, and Europe and included several languages. Finally, Elizabeth entered the publishing field herself in her drive to overcome the resistance of the commercial knitting authorities to new thought and practice, and to begin to start a new conversation among and between knitters themselves about their own practices and identities.

Nor could this breadth of influence be considered shallow as it has been remarkably durable. Elizabeth began her public activity in 1955 with her first design sale to *Woman's Day*, yet her work was effectively institutionalized both by the institution of Schoolhouse Press and by her daughter, the designer, writer, teacher and publisher, Meg Swansen. With the original books remaining in print, and supported by Meg's own titles, with now streaming video of the original Elizabeth tapes (*Knitter's Workshop*, *Knitting Around*, *Knitting Glossary*, plus multiple new single pattern videos), with the continuation of *Knitting Camp*, and the publication of *Wool Gathering*, and the significant online and social media savvy presence of Schoolhouse Press, Meg Swansen, and increasingly Cully Swansen (Elizabeth's grandson), Elizabeth's revolution of knitting has very successfully transitioned well beyond her own retirement in 1989, and death in 1999, with new expressions and iterations arising daily among the knitting communities. This range of influence across more than 7 decades has resulted in an extraordinary view of both the very fine grained activity of the individual in action and thought, and the very coarsest grained view of large swathes of communities and cultures in competition and movement across the decades. Elizabeth was clearly embedded, and subject to, the

historical struggles of her period as a middle-class white woman of European immigration, living in suburban and rural Wisconsin. But she was just as clearly an extraordinarily talented and energetic individual negotiating her way towards her own agenda with a marked degree of success, and with massive popular influence.

With such a rich and unexplored subject as Elizabeth and hand knitting, it is crucial to delineate the archive of actual materials. Midcentury book and periodical publications, especially those of Elizabeth herself and her contemporaries, has been crucial. While Elizabeth's titles have remained in print, many others have not. It is in fact a mark of Elizabeth's success that after her work of the early 70s, it is quite difficult to find the texts which promulgated the older paradigm's philosophies of knitting. While the mid-century issues of *Woman's Day* magazine have remained available through archival and library sources, many of the specialty periodical publications, such as the various *Women's Day Knitting Books*, *Vogue Knitting Book*, *McCall's Needlework and Craft*, *The Workbasket*, and *Knitter's* were available only through private purchase from collectors on the online auction site Ebay, and various Amazon vendors. Yet these sources were crucial in tracing Elizabeth's influence on popular conceptualizations of hand knitting. The researcher (and her checkbook) was more fortunate in her sources for tracing Elizabeth's interactions with the professional craftsmanship communities and identities of the Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen organization. The collection of their archives at the Milwaukee Art Museum, and at the Smithsonian Archive of American Art (available on microfilm) enabled a trace of Elizabeth as a member of the organization up to the end of the available records in the early seventies.

Yet the true gem of the available sources must be considered the extensive collection of original materials at Schoolhouse Press in Pittsville, Wisconsin, in the care of Meg and Cully Swansen. Their generosity and trust, in allowing the researcher access to materials still in commercial use by the Press, has been enormous and deeply appreciated. The collection includes business and personal records, letter series, clippings, book reviews, design journals, and teaching materials, as well as an extensive set of scrapbooks³ constructed by Elizabeth herself that preserved enormous numbers of fan letters, clippings, notes, event notifications, social cards, and many of Elizabeth's own reflections on those items. The collection includes multiple draft versions of several of Elizabeth's published books, and, more importantly for this work, at least two significant unpublished manuscripts. These are Elizabeth's memoir, originally written for private family use in the early sixties, and later partially published in *Knitting Around* (1989), and a previously unknown original draft of what became *Knitter's Almanac*. This latter manuscript, written in 1971, is a much different and expanded version of the final publication and ranges across a wide variety of topics of interest to the scholarly researcher. It is likely that this last manuscript, known colloquially to the researcher and Schoolhouse Press as 'the lost document' will eventually see publication as Elizabeth's fifth book.

Elizabeth's archive is one that illumines a broad range of historical and cultural interests across a variety of scholarly fields but specifically as a case study in the

³ It is, in fact, a little unclear how many scrapbooks exist, as the researcher kept discovering further volumes. At last count, the number was 17 but at least 2 of these had been added to by Meg Swansen as records of her professional work. The working nature of the Press and the continued use of the archive for commercial purposes made it a collection that had somewhat amorphous edges.

practical production of social and cultural identity against the backdrop of increasing women's autonomy in the period, as a case of resistance to commercial and industrial identifications around the practice and conceptualization of hand knitting as cultural production and reproduction, and, finally, as the generation of an alternative conceptualization of craft professionalism. The work of anthropologists Dorothy Holland and Jean Lave in their text *History in Person* focuses on social and individual practices generative of individual and communal identities in relationship to the larger and more durably instituted historical and cultural movements, and offers a number of contemporary and historical case studies of this process.⁴ Francesca Bray brings this recognition of the individual acting in collusion and resistance to social identity in her work on hand weaving as a technological production of women's identity in late Imperial Chinese society. Her example of the *swadeshi* movement of mid-century India, with its production of homespun cloth as a "less economically efficient" commercial enterprise while remaining a highly "efficient technique for the production of Indian Nationalism"⁵ was deeply illuminative for me in connecting the shifting practices of hand knitting around the shifting identity of the mid-century American hand knitter. Marie Griffith's scholarship on conservative religious women and their embrace of a recognizable form of traditional femininity while reshuffling pre-existing elements of identity into new priorities outside of traditional gender roles and spaces⁶ was also instructive in helping to

⁴ Dorothy Holland and Jean Lave, *History in Person: Enduring Struggles, Contentious Practice, Intimate Identities* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2011).

⁵ Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 21.

⁶ Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

understand how previously minor elements of hand knitting practice could be strengthened and re-arranged into fully new conceptualizations of identity.

My understanding of Elizabeth's role in resisting commercial and industrial impositions of knitting identity in favor of her own identification of knitting craftsmanship was shaped by the work of two scholars. Liz Cohen's *A Consumers' Republic: the Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*,⁷ and Susan Douglas' *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*,⁸ both focus attention on the growing sophistication of the advertising practices of market segmentation as primary shapers of American women's identity in this period. They trace the broadly successful national media's prescriptive identifications as primary influences on mid- and late-twentieth century women. Yet knitting fits into this narrative as a contrary tale. The midcentury knitting industry's tone-deafness with regard to the interests of its consumers, and its subsequent failure to recognize a vital segment of knitters' interests, provided an opening for alternative identifications made largely by knitters themselves. Thus knitting as craftsmanship, and as a viable form of cultural production, was able to generate the individual and social identities that could support major new publications, institutions and associations, that could in turn, self-replicate across time and reproduce new individuals, in resistance to previously dominant conceptual forms of commerce and industry.

Yet the term 'cultural producer' could be brought to an even finer focus around the specific negotiations over the idea of professionalism in craftwork. My reading of

⁷ Elizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

⁸ Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1994).

Sandra Alföldy's phenomenal work *Crafting Identity: The Development of Professional Fine Craft in Canada*,⁹ and of Janet Koplos and Bruce Metcalf's *Makers: a History of American Studio Craft*¹⁰ facilitated my understanding of Elizabeth and the new knitters as an alternative version of modern craft professionalism, which, instead of firmly segregating domestic and professional practice, fused the professional-housewife-artist identity. This newly fused identity, enacted by Elizabeth and traced in this research, can in fact be viewed as an early version of the contemporary Makers Movement described in multiple places by such scholars as Glenn Adamson, David Gauntlett, Maria Elena Buszek, Bruce Metcalf, and again, Sandra Alföldy.¹¹ Elizabeth and her trajectory can be held up to a number of areas of scholarship in women's history, cultural studies, and art and design as a satisfying addition to and intersection with previous scholarship.

My work on Elizabeth Zimmermann and American hand knitting follows a chronological organization. The first chapter, "Meeting in Milwaukee" traces Elizabeth's early history, her European life and her early American immigrant experiences, and excavates a snapshot of mid-fifties American hand knitting as presented by contemporary periodical and book publications. Her unpublished essay on her three knitting cultures is key to understanding her own level of proficiency in knitting, and her appalled recognition of the standard of American knitting. Chapter Two, "The Opinionated

⁹ Sandra Alföldy, *Crafting Identity: The Development of Professional Fine Craft in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Janet Koplos and Bruce Metcalf, *Makers: a History of American Studio Craft*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

¹¹ The contemporary craft-DIY-makers movements has an extensive literature but includes *NeoCraft: Modernity and the Crafts* (Sandra Alföldy, ed. NSCAD Press, 2007); *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art* (Maria Elena Buszek, ed. Duke University Press, 2011); *Making and Connecting: The social meaning of Creativity from DIY and Knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0* (David Gauntlett, Polity Press, 2011), and *The Invention of Craft* (Glenn Adamson, Bloomsberg Academic, 2013).

Knitter: Negotiating around Domesticity, Craftsmanship and Industry” explores Elizabeth’s early ventures into the business and practice of studio craftsmanship as the search for high quality materials, sales and exhibition opportunities, design sales, and professional affiliations. Her interactions with the Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen organization, and with the Wisconsin State Fair reveal a somewhat troubled relationship of knitting to professional craft identities, while her frustrations as a designer with the commercial knitting industry became acute. Elizabeth’s resolution of the conflicting identities of craftsman and designer is examined in Chapter 3 “Dear Knitter” as she stepped outside of both paradigms and spoke directly to the American knitter (as represented in her customer list) through her initial periodical publication, *the Newsletter*, and through her later book publications *Knitting without Tears* (1971) and *the Knitter’s Almanac* (1974). Her various writing makes clear her alternative conceptualization of the knitter as capable of original design and self-expressive craftsmanship within a mastery of technique and materials, speaking out in resistance to commercial and industrial prescriptions for practice and material while clearly embedded in domesticity. The final chapter, “Dear Elizabeth: American Knitters Respond” traces the response of individuals, communities and, eventually, new periodicals/institutions to Elizabeth’s conceptualizations in print and on television. In examining the durable success of the alternative version of craftsmanship, I also address the unresolved (and durable) difficulty over intellectual ownership in this new identity, and within these new communities.

My work on Elizabeth Zimmermann, and American hand knitting, has been interdisciplinary in several ways. It has accessed the traditional historian's sources of primary documents, and published texts, while applying the cultural studies scholar's social and cultural theories on agency and identity to historical documents and pop culture representations. But this work would not have been possible without a further intersection with my own practice of craftsmanship and studio discipline. My reading of Elizabeth, her work and thought, and her intersections with the social and cultural realities of her period has been deeply informed by my own history as a housewife-artist-craft professional, and by my familiarity with the technical and material intricacies of hand knitting and design in textiles. My practice of scholarship has been profoundly shaped by my practice of studio craft.



Figure 1. "Dewey Decimal Classification 700 Arts and Recreation" (image by Lilly Marsh)

This interdisciplinary intersection has continued through the project to influence the products of this scholarly work. My argument, that Elizabeth profoundly re-shaped

American hand knitting from a culturally reproductive form of pattern following towards a culturally productive form of self-expression and innovation that gave rise to the multiple forms and genres of contemporary knitting, is shaped both as a traditional dissertation, and as a creative gallery exhibition of knit wire sculptural work which queries the idea of archives and collections, and the public library as a point of connection between the researcher/artist and the consumer of that research/artistic product. My six small knit wire sculptures are displayed in the stacks at the West Lafayette Public Library as a conflation of my Zimmermann research and the idea of a personal archive. Situated according to the Dewey Decimal Classification, and with an invitation to the viewer to respond with regard to that classification, the exhibit acts as a solicitation of the viewer to expose their own identity, and the evidence for that identity. The sculptures allow for the response of the viewers to be read as part of the exhibit on the part of the following viewers, thus accumulating multiple voices and viewpoints in the exploration of archives and personal identity. The object titled “Dewey Decimal 700” identifies some of Elizabeth’s non-knitting activities and queries the viewer to identify a fuller representation of “what do you do?” beyond a definition of occupation. At the close of the interactive period, the sculptures, and all responses, will be placed in a display cabinet at the library for the month of March 2016, as a representation of the multiple voices and identities engaged in identity production through personal reflection and active engagement. This critical juncture of action and thought is the very stuff of craftsmanship and art in general, and the practice of knitting specifically as culturally productive of intimate individual identities interacting en masse to shape new cultural blocs and trajectories.

CHAPTER 1. SETTING THE STAGE: AMERICAN KNITTING AT MIDCENTURY

The timeless quality of knitting is apparent in the visual images of the knitter, hands in position between torso and shoulders, the knitting itself dropping to the lap below. The knitter may be alone, with an inward focus which typifies the self-contained quality of the act of creative production, or in company, talking or listening to others, but with work in hand. It is an image of ‘the knitter’ which could be accurately placed in very nearly any time or culture. But it is a mistake to trust to that apparent cultural unity across history and culture.¹² The act of knitting, and the individual knitter, is, like any activity, highly contextualized within the framework of culture and history. The knitter changes gender and class across history, the motivations for knitting are driven by a wide variety of economic, social and artistic premises, and the materials and techniques change with economic, consumer, and technological trends. In this ebb and flow of social and cultural movement, individuals, and groups, become influential.

Elizabeth Zimmermann was one such influential knitter, entering into the American knitting consciousness in 1955, and, continuing with increasing influence, well beyond her retirement from active professional life in 1989, on into the current life of American knitting. Elizabeth and American hand knitting both require a full accounting

¹² A fascinating discussion of this issue in textile production is provided by EM Brumfiel. "Cloth, Gender, Continuity, and Change: Fabricating Unity in Anthropology." *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 4 (2006): 862-77.

of that context in order to understand their mutual influences and their place in the larger cultural transformations of the period. By examining a variety of print sources, interviews, and Elizabeth's private papers, I will establish the context of American hand knitting in the early nineteen-fifties and sixties as a period of confusion and disconnect between the traditional purveyors of knitting, (yarn manufacturers and knitting publications, and to a lesser extent, home economics professionals), and their audience of knitters amidst significant national economic, technical and social changes. I argue that the industry, out of what can be viewed as a kind of industrial inertia, both failed to recognize shifts in their audience's motivations for knitting, and, neglected to productively inform knitters about new materials or alternative techniques. The overwhelming reliance in the industry on project-based instructions (very specific and detailed instructions on how to make a single specific item, rather than general information on knitting practices and materials) left many knitters unequipped to contend with the significant changes in materials or with corollary changes in practice, and frustrated in finding further knitting support. The industry's insistence on following the pattern making standards of commercial dressmaking narrowed options for knitting practice and design. This failure on the part of industry and the publications left a space for energetic individual knitters to begin to speak for themselves and directly to other knitters.

That significant shift in motivations for knitting came about as economics realities and gender norms shifted position in the fifties and sixties. Hand knitting had provided an individual or household with low-cost, functional, and fashionable knits in earlier decades. But by the mid-sixties, the increasing prosperity of the middle class, coupled

with newly available and cheap imported clothing, made hand knitting untenable as a viable activity of the domestic economy. As fashions and clothing trends shifted with increasing speed, the relative slowness of hand knitting was incompatible with having a selection of up-to-the-minute fashion in the closet. Wider opportunities for women and the economic benefits of paid work led to a decreasing number of women pursuing a traditionally domestic 'at home' career. As women began to explore a much wider variety of both professional and private activities, knitting as one of many traditional markers for the ideal, domestic, woman (much remarked upon in the knitting publications of the period) fell, like many of the other traditional activities of domesticity, by the wayside. Those women that remained active knitters were primarily pursuing their craft not for economic reasons, or for fashionability, but because they found knitting to be enjoyable for its own sake. The knitting industry seems to have been slow to recognize these changes in their audience regarding economics and domesticity.

The industry's paradigm for relaying information was bedeviled by inertia and resistance to change. Industry and consumer publications were uniform in their presentation of project-based directions with only the most elementary directions offered outside of the specific project, and in their utter reliance on the principles of design for dressmaking. General knitting information, beyond the most basic techniques, was not to be found. Project directions were provided with little or no copy regarding techniques, and instructions were written in a highly detailed and technical abbreviated code (and often in very fine print) that directed each individual stitch in the production of flat pattern sections to be sewn together, as for commercial dressmaking. Knitters had little opportunity for growth in either knowledge or skill, even as the industry introduced the

new synthetic yarns in this post-war period. This confluence of the lack of information regarding new materials and practices, coupled with declining energy in what had been major motivations for knitting (economics and ideals of domesticity), and a far greater variety of leisure and professional activities for women led to a major decline in American knitting. It is into this vacuum that Elizabeth Zimmermann slips as a deeply re-energizing figure.

Elizabeth emerged onto the American knitting scene in 1955, as a designer for publication and as a source of high quality wool yarns. Her intense frustration with the limited and poor quality information available in contemporary publications, and her outrage in having her designs changed beyond recognition by editorial fiat, drove her, in 1957, to generate her own direct-to-knitter newsletter. It is important to understand that Elizabeth's self-insertion into the industry was overtly a single act of consumer resistance and designer frustration but, it was given durable traction by her customers/audience attraction to her specific philosophy and methodology around knitting. She insisted on designing for knitting, not for commercial dress making, and she emphasized the practices of the craft which took advantage of knitting's own unique properties. Amidst the multiple but now fading motivations for knitting, Elizabeth foregrounded a previously minor motivation of personal creativity and self-expression that had been largely ignored by the commercial voices. It is in this area that her personal philosophy of knitting as knowledgeable and self-expressive artisanship, supported by her early experiences across class boundaries and solidified in her art school credentials, becomes highly and durably influential. She insisted that each and every knitter should be a knowledgeable artisan and was responsible for making intelligent design and material decisions based on his or her

own requirements for the project. This liberated and self-determining knitter troubled, thus, the industry-consumer model of a more passive recipient of commercial direction. Elizabeth, in fact, insisted throughout her long career that knitting was properly viewed as the full equal to glass, ceramics, handweaving, and jewelry in the tradition of fine studio craftsmanship and art and that knitting should be practiced as craftsmanship. This chapter will present an overview of the context of American knitting prior to 1960 and will introduce Elizabeth as an outsider with considerable experience with several models of knitting culture. As an immigrant, Elizabeth brought a wide variety of techniques and plenty of ideas about how knitting in America might be very different.

The state of American hand knitting in 1955 was largely one of a top-down, industrial-commercial authority towards knitters. Commercial yarn manufacturers produced pattern booklets while national and regional women's magazines carried patterns for projects and knitting information. Knitters received information on products and designs through this combination of publications, and through other knitters (family, friends and salespeople). Nearly all the major women's magazines carried some knitting patterns to a varying degree but *Woman's Day* was consistently engaged with knitters in publishing occasional articles and picture spreads in the monthly magazine and providing patterns and an annual pattern booklet available upon request. There were a few specialty magazines, notably *Vogue Knitting Book* (Conde Nast, New York) and, much lesser well-known, *the Workbasket: Home and Needlecraft for Pleasure and Profit* (Modern Handcrafts, Kansas City Mo). These periodicals were supplemented by a very wide variety of pattern and instruction booklets, generated by nearly every yarn manufacturer and made available for sale, or as promotional giveaways, through yarn shops and

department stores. The yarn manufacturers were also influential in book publishing either as individuals, or, as part of industry trade organizations such as the Institute for Hand Knitting. These books, examined below, were often industry backed publications through a commissioned professional writer. The majority of books remained well within the industry paradigm centered on a professional industry authority condescending towards a somewhat passive consumer knitter. Only a very few titles seem to be outside of this commercial paradigm until the late nineteen-sixties.

This situation, while it clearly demonstrates the dominance of the industry and retail voices in disseminating information leaves us in a problematic position. This is an archive of an overwhelmingly industry-driven image of the American knitter coupled with little self-representation, that is, actual knitters speaking for themselves. This is a fairly typical issue for women's history, and other scholars have pointed out the difficulties over trying to access an accurate view of individuals or groups of women engaging in actual behavior through such ideologically prescriptive sources.¹³ Yet more and more women were starting to speak for themselves in this period and such knitters as Virginia Woods Bellamy, Ida Riley Duncan, and Barbara Abbey published in this period. Elizabeth Zimmermann is an especially valuable lens in examining, not only herself as a significant and influential knitter, but the voices of ordinary knitters. Her archive of materials is extensive and includes an enormous amount of correspondence with knitters across the country that continued over decades, and offers us a view of knitters' self-representations amidst diversity in class, politics, and economics. Through her papers and

¹³ Jessamyn Neuhaus, "The Way to a Man's Heart: Gender Roles, Domestic Ideology, and Cookbooks in the 1950s," *Journal of Social History* 32, no. 3 (1999):530.

publications, she offers a powerful and prolific individual voice extending over several decades. She wrote extensively about the consumer resistance origins of her newsletter in multiple publications but her unpublished 1971 document (the ‘lost manuscript’) provides a deeper and more discursive essay on her thoughts on American, German and British knitting practices and her impetus to resist the then current American knitting culture. By juxtaposing the consumer resistance and artisanship activities of Elizabeth Zimmermann with this industrial-commercial image, and the individual voices of the fan mail collection, we may excavate a much more realistic vision, though yet still incomplete with regard to representation (or self-representation) on the part of all American knitters.

It is important to recognize the limited nature of even this expanded archive of materials. One of the problems of my archive is that of under representation, or no representation, of various groups. All the publications of the day ignored knitters of color, and represented male knitters only as astonishing novelties, if at all. The emerging ‘new’ knitters were much more inclusive around class, gender, and geography with strong Midwestern, rural, gay/lesbian, and radical feminist representations, but with little to no representation of diversity in race or ethnicity. Knitters of color were invisible as knitters in both

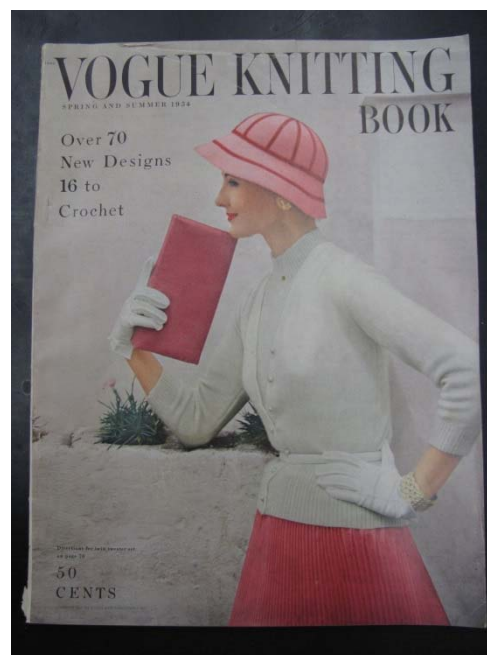


Figure 2. *Vogue Knitting Book* Spring Summer 1954, (Conde Nast). Cover

groups in this period. While twenty-first century knitting in both print and online seems much more representative of the general population with nearly all groups represented,

those representations of knitting from 1950-1990 are much less so. In speaking of this enlarged and contextualized narrative of American knitting between the various groups of the period, it is paramount that the invisibility of knitters of color be noted and that the new knitters, though welcoming to greater diversity that previously represented, yet remained exclusively white and Northern European in representation.

1.1 Knitting as Represented in Publications

The three periodicals reviewed for this work, *Vogue Knitting Book*, *Woman's Day*, and *The Workbasket* represent variant readerships across class and motivation, but also exhibit remarkable similarities in presentation and in the commercial industry's assumptions about knitting and knitters. While the three periodicals under review did have very different audiences, and corresponding motivations in their particular focus, their uniformity in presentation is remarkably consistent with regard to knitting itself. Across the board, the industry presented project-based directions, with little or no options for custom modifications by the knitter, and based in commercial principles of dress making patterns. There were rarely any feature articles on knitting, scant general directions for knitting beyond the most basic, and rarely any credit offered to knitting designers. Despite the enormous changes in the textile field wrought by the



Figure 3. "Two Piece Dress with Own Jacket" *Vogue Knitting Book*, Spring Summer, 1954, (Conde Nast), 17

introduction of synthetics in this period, the hand knitting industry maintained a strictly product-based attitude with information on laundering and moth resistance (for the finished product) but no information provided on how the synthetic yarn would require changes in knitting design and practice. Furthermore, analysis exposes the trajectory of the increasingly close relationship between the publishers and the yarn manufacturers. Both *Vogue Knitting Book* and *Woman's Day* were increasingly closely partnered between yarn recommendations in the project pages and advertising by the yarn manufacturers. *The Work Basket*, in this period, seemed to have relied very little on advertisement from yarn companies, though it increasingly moved away from generic commodity yarns towards brand name recommendation in its projects across the period. This shift towards yarn branding in project directions was problematic for knitters in limiting their ability to make simple modifications to patterns through use of other yarns. This uniformity was maintained largely despite significant differences in their respective audiences.

Vogue Knitting Book, published by Conde Nast since 1932, was directed, throughout the fifties, towards an elite (or at least aspirational) readership, and was primarily concerned with style and fashion. Published twice yearly, as a Spring-Summer issue and Fall-Winter issue, it was a dedicated specialty magazine for knitting, though it very occasionally offered crocheted projects. It included project images with full directions for each project, full, half page and partial column advertisements for yarn and knitting notions vendors, and a very limited set of basic introductory guidelines for general knitting. These guidelines included instructions on basic stitches and techniques and seemed to be identical from one issue to the next across the decade, despite the

changes in materials with the onset of synthetic fibers. The primary focus of each issue was the individual projects categorized by genre (“Dresses and Suits”), by featured stitch (“Cable Classics”), or by gender or age (“Men” and “Children”). Photographs of the finished projects worn by models on location would be featured and captioned with a basic description of the finished garment, and the page number for directions provided elsewhere in the magazine. Throughout the fifties, under the editorship of Ruth Seder Cooke, *Vogue Knitting Book* was shot in various national and international resort spots including Stowe, Vermont; Cape Cod, Massachusetts; Cooperstown, New York; and the Caribbean island states of Bermuda, Jamaica, and Cuba. Knitted items were shown on location in stately homes, in yachts, in golf carts and croquet courts, paired with furs, and even preparing to board a cruise ship (see Figure 3).



Figure 4. *Vogue Knitting Book* Fall Winter 1969, (Conde Nast) Cover.

By the nineteen-sixties, *Vogue Knitting Book* was under the editorship of Helen Catchings Bascome and later Patricia Boyle, and it took on a slightly different class atmosphere, with more attention to younger fashion trends and with far fewer glamour location photo shoots (though the 1964 Fall-Winter issue did feature Paris as location). The last issue discovered of *Vogue Knitting Book* published by Conde Nast is the Fall-Winter 1969 issue. No American issues after this date have been located by the researcher.¹⁴

¹⁴ Anne Macdonald refers to *Vogue Knitting Book*'s closure in *No Idle Hands: The Social History of American Knitting* as sometime in the 1960s but gives no final publication date by Conde Nast. It is a confusing situation as multiple *Vogue Knitting* periodicals drifted in and out of national and international publication with various publishers across the United Kingdom. My discussion is centered on the *Vogue Knitting Book*, published by Conde Nast in New York City, OCLC # 15098883.

Despite superficial changes in format across the decades, the presentation of knitting itself remained little changed. Designers and copy writers remained uncredited, no feature articles on knitting offered, garments were described as finished products and designs were presented according to dress making principles and standards.

Vogue Knitting Book's readership was clearly imagined as elite or at least upper middle class, interested in travel and with sophisticated tastes, and able to participate in the latest fashions. While the decade of the fifties did seem to assume a slightly older, married and with children, reader with elite, classic tastes, and the sixties appear to shift towards a younger, single knitter with far fewer men's and children's articles, fewer family images, and more seasonal fashion trends, the focus of the publication remained on the individual projects and on the brand names of the manufactures. In this focus, *Vogue Knitting Book* was remarkably similar to the second periodical under examination, *Woman's Day*.

Woman's Day, with its 1931 origins as a shopping circular, was much more concerned with economic functionality and was directed towards a middle and lower middle class readership. As one of the largest circulations and most profitable of the Seven Sisters' women's magazines, it was published monthly and covered a very wide variety of consumer interest topics¹⁵ but it frequently included knitting projects in its regular "Needlework Department." While it occasionally included some project directions within the monthly publication, it more often used a multi-page feature of knitwear images to drive interested readers to request the *Woman's Day* pattern

¹⁵ Ellen Marie McCracken, *Decoding Women's Magazines: From Mademoiselle to Ms.* (New York: MacMillan, 1993), 173-6.

collections by mail order as separate specialty publications. While the magazine itself has been widely studied, the specialty knitting publications are much less well documented. The publishing trajectory of these specialty issues is difficult to ascertain across the decades and across the 1960 *Woman's Day* purchase by Fawcett Publications. Fawcett Publications produced a number of specialty knitting publications with various names and under various (or uncredited) editorial mastheads at different periods between 1961 and 1977. Roxa Wright was the *Woman's Day* Magazine editor for Needlework in the nineteen-fifties (and correspondent with Elizabeth Zimmermann), with Lucille Curtis, and Doris Warren following in the nineteen-sixties, but none of these individuals appear in the researcher's *Woman's Day Knitting Books* as editors. The books from the 1950s refer only to the editorial staff of *Woman's Day* but later Fawcett Publication issues credit Dan Blue (1965), Ellene Saunders (1966-1973) and even longtime *Vogue Knitting Book* editor Ruth Seder Cooke as editor of the 1965 *Woman's Day Knitting Book* (no.2). Some of these are annual publications while others are numbered and were perhaps issued more frequently. The confusing trajectory of these specialty publications was compounded by inconsistent layout styles in project presentation and image captioning within the period and it seems likely that a number of internal groups within Fawcett Publications had access to the *Woman's Day* title. This current analysis was based on twelve *Woman's Day* specialty knitting publications between 1950 and 1973, and on the *Woman's Day Book of Knitted Sweaters*, a collection of 75 women's, men's and children's sweaters

previously published in the magazine, published in book form by Simon and Schuster in 1970.¹⁶

Overall, these *Woman's Day Knitting Books* were remarkably similar to *Vogue Knitting Book* in their focus on the finished product rather than the process of knitting in general, and their commercial dressmaking pattern standards. Like *Vogue Knitting Book*, *Woman's Day Knitting Books* increasingly reduced the information provided regarding yarn types and fibers and began to rely more heavily on brand name yarns with little or no information regarding yarn weights or fiber types across these two decades. *Woman's Day Magazine* feature articles on knitwear emphasized the finished garments as fashionable, functional and affordable but very few addressed knitting as process issues. Directions for general knitting were highly repetitive across all publications and addressed only the most basic techniques for novice knitters. The 1953 November issue was highly atypical in identifying and crediting the designer Jack Bodi, but the text emphasized the fashionability of the new 'bulky look' and the very low cost (both financially and in time spent knitting) of using Star Brand heavy cotton rug yarn.¹⁷ In fact, the article ignores significant knitting process-design fundamentals, and recommended either using the heavy cotton rug yarn or Bear Brand JumboLaine (a very bulky wool yarn), two fibers not easily interchangeable. Despite recommending their interchangeability, no directions were given for actually doing so. This assumption of the interchangeability of wool and cotton was in fact a major design flaw and no images of

¹⁶ All of these materials are in the personal collection of the author. They seem to be largely uncollected by libraries or archives. World Cat shows only an Australian publication and a *Woman's Day* annual knitting publication (OCLC: 42336234) with incomplete and incorrect information.

¹⁷ "The Bulky Look is Sweeping the Country" *Woman's Day*, November 1953, 37-45, 116.

the sweaters knit in a wool yarn were presented. With no information about the change in design and techniques required by this change in fiber type, there was little chance that these alternative wool sweaters would have been successful projects. It is further interesting that in presenting Jack Bodi as the designer, the accompanying copy emphasized his inexperience and recent entry into design as an exciting and beneficial aspect of his work.

The magazine *The Workbasket: Home and Needlecraft for Pleasure and Profit* was a very different type of publication in audience class and in assumptions around knitting motivations, as well as the kinds of information offered when compared to either *Vogue Knitting Book* or *Woman's Day Magazine* and the various *Woman's Day Knitting Books*. Much less well known, it has been neglected by scholars (as far as I can tell), and requires a somewhat more detailed contextualization. Founded in 1935 and published monthly by Modern Handcraft, Inc., out of Kansas City, Missouri, *the Work Basket* began as a “small 8 page needlework service bulletin” with an

original mailing list of about 5000.¹⁸ By 1967, its paid readership hovered at 1.5 million.¹⁹ Its purposes were outlined clearly on the front cover: “*The Work Basket Home*



Figure 5. *The Work Basket*, March 1950

¹⁸ “New Home for the Workbasket” *The Workbasket and Home Arts Magazine*, January 1966, 3.

¹⁹ “Statement of Ownership”, *The Workbasket*, December 1967, 57.

and Needlecraft: For Pleasure and Profit: Ideas for the Bazaar, the Home, Gifts, Sparetime Money Makers, with Many Articles, Easily Made and Inexpensive, that Find a Ready Sale."²⁰ This small format monthly periodical (8 in x 5.5 in) was printed on newsprint in black and white, (adding a slick cover and some color photo interior images in January 1965) and covered a variety of topics regarding home, kitchen, crafts, gardens and small moneymaking ventures. It regularly featured a "Needlework Department" with crochet, knitting and tatting projects; a "Food Department" with recipes for meal and ingredient preparation; and a "Garden Forum" for yard and garden questions. A more occasional department, "Basket of Books", carried book reviews on recent publications on craft, household management, and, kitchen and garden issues. Its editorial focus on "profit" was apparent in many articles²¹ and the permanent short write-in forum, "Women Who Make Cents," provided a constant stream of anecdotes regarding "specific women who have found ways to add to the family income."²² Throughout the fifties, it also included some advertising regarding craft and garden materials but generally a far greater quantity of more general 'women's' advertising on weight loss, hearing aids, plus sized clothing and sewing pattern services, and a very wide variety of home based money making ventures for personal profit or for group fundraising.²³

²⁰ *The Workbasket*, March 1950, front cover.

²¹ The June 1955 issue included an article "Conveying Cash Cleverly" by Martha Graham, detailed a number of ways to tastefully give a new bride cash gifts of coins hidden in sets of measuring spoons or pasted onto rolling pins.

²² *The Workbasket*, March 1950, 20.

²³ The number of advertisements directed towards incentivizing women's fundraising efforts for organizations attests to *the Work Basket's* perception that their readers were deeply and productively embedded in local community organizations in great need of 40 cup coffee urns.

The Work Basket was directed to a far different audience than either *Vogue Knitting Book* or the various *Women's Day Knitting Books* with its emphasis on the home as a productive site and the role of the housewife as income producer. While it never openly addressed these social issues (or any others) in the larger sense, the *Workbasket* regularly dealt with vegetable gardening, home canning and sewing articles, and with small moneymaking ventures, especially in the nineteen-fifties and early sixties. This difference in favor of knowledgeable and independent production carried into the needlework presentations in two ways. First, the editorial staff offered somewhat more in the way of general information, beyond individual project pattern directions, regarding knitting and yarns both as tips in regular columns, as very occasional feature articles, and in the irregular book review section. An early regular column, "Needle Pointers" offered, in 1955, basic instructions on burn testing, a technical method of ash analysis for the determination of fiber content in yarns.²⁴ Infrequent feature articles covered information on various knitting needles, directions for individual surface design modifications to either commercial or hand knit sweaters, and variations on cast-on techniques. An article on dyeing yarns for rug hooking, April 1959, provided directions for dyeing up to 15 shades of a single color with clear assumptions that a project might use 30-40 individual colors.²⁵ These articles, though not regular and of widely varying quality, did offer the knitting reader more information on general knitting and yarns than that found in the other publications. This interest in materials and technical information was made even more apparent in the irregular "Basket of Books" book review column. The texts

²⁴ "Needle Pointers". *The Work Basket*, May 1955, 3.

²⁵ Avon McCurdy, "Hook Chair Seats as you would a Rug" *The Work Basket*, April 1959, 20-26.

reviewed were not usually project-based pattern books but were technical reference books including a 1967 academic design text published by Wiley and Sons, *Design for You*, by Beutler and Lockhart. Topics covered in the book review sections covered kiln building, high fired ceramic ware, tailoring techniques, ecclesiastical needlework, and basketry.²⁶ By offering this kind of occasional technical information to its readers, *The Workbasket* was offering a slightly different product to its readers, one more respectful of their own creative productive capacities and their ambition for technical knowledge.

Secondly, the *Workbasket* Needlework Department infrequently included knitting stitch patterns that were to be used as ingredients in larger personal projects. *The Workbasket* did primarily offer projects very similar to both *Vogue Knitting Book* and *Woman's Day Knitting Books* in both style of presentation and in their reliance on the commercial dress making standards. But it also, occasionally, offered edgings and stitches suitable for use in the knitter's own designs, or for substitution in commercial designs. Both in knitting and crocheting projects, the editorial staff provided patterns that did not themselves make up complete projects, but could be inserted into shawls, doilies, bedspreads and table coverings not shown in the magazine. This recognition that the crafty reader had projects of his or her own, independent of the publications, was unique among the knitting publications and offered a respect to the crafter's intelligence and skills.

Yet this attitude towards its readers was troubled by a degree of class ambivalence. While the editorial staff of the *Workbasket* offered a measure of respect to

²⁶ The dearth of knitting texts reviewed confirms the scarcity of knitting texts in this period.

its readers, its advertising reflected the larger culture's class assumptions about these Midwestern, working class subscribers. While the early nineteen-fifties *Workbasket* did carry some advertising for major yarn companies such as Patons, Spinnerin, Coats and Clark, and January & Wood, the overwhelming majority of advertising was directed towards home sales ventures, such as "Easy Way for You and Your Husband to Start BIG PAY of Your Own...Metalize Baby Shoes at Home- Full or Spare Time" and towards beauty enhancement products "Small Bust Women! Special Design 'Up and Out' Bra Gives You a Fuller Alluring Bustline Instantly.'²⁷ Such ads were distinctly off-putting to many women and one nickname for the *Workbasket* was the "Trash basket", despite its editorial content.²⁸

Class issues in *The Workbasket* shifted significantly across the fifties and sixties, and reflected the rising prosperity of its Midwestern readership. Multi-paged advertising for real estate in Florida and New Mexico in the late fifties attest to the possibilities for second homes, vacation, and retirement home purchases. This change in prosperity and class sensibility was reflected in the Needlework department between the balance of crochet and knitting projects. Crochet, a needlework process apparently similar to knitting in many important aspects, has long been considered a poor working class cousin to middle/upper class knitting. Elizabeth Zimmermann herself articulates this position in her autobiographical *Knitting Around* (discussed later in this chapter).²⁹ *The Workbasket*

²⁷ *The Work Basket*, March 1950, 20, 9.

²⁸ Jean Christensen, interview by L. Marsh, August 19, 2013.

²⁹ The class issue around knitting and crochet could be examined by way of each process's end products. Crochet is far more typically used for household products (doilies, place mats, dresser scarves, stuffed toys, and bedspreads) than for clothing, while knitting is primarily garments for personal wear. Class differences around body adornment versus household decoration and utility would make an interesting study. But not in this dissertation.

reflected this class shift across this period as its project pages shifted from a heavy orientation in favor of crochet towards one in favor of knitting. In 1961, *The Workbasket* consistently ran over 2.5 crochet projects for each knitting project. In 1963, crochet had dropped to only just above 1.5 crochet to each knitting and that number further dropped by 1966, when knitting predominated at over 3 articles for every two crochet, and continues to hover at just under that level in 1967. This shift in focus from crochet to knitting significantly shifted the genres of projects from those oriented around household ornamentation and functionality towards personal garments.³⁰

Unfortunately, this movement in class orientation which gave prominence to knitting in the Needlework department was not reflected in the advertising as all textile craft advertising continued to decrease sharply. Many issues of the nineteen-sixties offering no commercial support whatsoever to the textile crafts. Instead, *The Workbasket* turned increasingly to gardening for a larger proportion of its feature articles and the preponderance of advertising space occupied with seed suppliers and nursery companies alongside bust developers and home business opportunities. Though *The Workbasket* had long been partially owned by the Flower and Garden Foundation, it was increasingly dedicated to gardening through the sixties and seventies. This shift in orientation was institutionalized eventually by the sale of *the Workbasket* to KC Publishing in 1996, where it was renamed *Flower and Garden Crafts Edition*.³¹

³⁰ These numbers are based on calculations of projects in volumes for which the researcher had full run issues and does not include partial years.

³¹ Marian Anderson, "Workbasket History", *MyCraftBasket* [blog]
<http://mycraftbasket.com/Workbasket/index.html> (last updated September 6, 2013) accessed June 17, 2016.

These three periodicals, *Vogue Knitting Book*, *Woman's Day* and the corresponding *Woman's Day Knitting Books*, and *the Workbasket*, exhibited a uniform orientation towards knitting despite their disparate audiences and purposes. Their overwhelming focus on the purpose of the finished project (fashion, function or profit) coupled with the project based directions generated a single focus on the product of knitting, rather than the process of knitting. The partnership between the manufacturer and the editorial staff, and the anonymity of designers, emphasized yarn brand names and effectively removed the viewpoint or voice of the knitter as an individual. The invisibility of designers/knitters might have been connected to the general lack of feature articles on knitting that might have provided greater access to a wider variety of techniques and information about knitting and its materials.³² The very similar styles of pattern directions among the publications did standardize abbreviations and pattern information but it also strictly limited the variety of information available. Over and over again, the same most basic techniques were provided across all publications with little recognition that multiple options existed for each purpose (casting on, off, increasing, buttonholes, etc.).

Finally, the insistence on rooting knitting patterns in dressmaking principles, according to the garment industry's specifications for standard dress size and shape enforced the generation of flat shaped elements to be sewn into whole garments, as if they were woven, rather than knit. The knitter was, in effect, reproducing a commercial product to commercial standards. This was acceptable if the knitter inhabited that ideal,

³² This would require further research but I suspect that the exclusion of the designer from the public face of knitting did disincentivize the writing of feature articles. It is not at all clear that the editors and manufacturers would have welcomed a critical and knowledgeable voice added to their long term relationship.

commercially sized and shaped body but was much less useful in knitting a custom garment that fit the actual knitter's body. Beyond occasional instructions on adding or subtracting length to a garment, very few instructions on modifying for custom fit were offered in these periodicals. Knitters were directed to reproduce sewn garments rather than take advantage of the unique properties of knitting for clothing production. Again, the reproduction of a commercially sized and shaped product renders the individual knitter herself invisible in favor of standardization.

These project directions changed little across the decades while changes in commercially available yarns were significant in both the general field and to the individual knitter. The introduction of synthetics to the hand knitting market had significant impact on design and technique for hand knitters, but the increasing emphasis in the periodicals on using brand name yarns, with little or no information regarding fiber type or weight, was problematic for the designer/knitter. Both the type of fiber (wool, cotton, acrylic, etc.) and the weight of the yarn (knitting worsted, sport, fingering or lace) are critical in most design and knitting decisions. Synthetics, wool and cotton have varying degrees of elasticity and require different allowances in fit and shape for garments.³³ This lack of information on fiber type limited knitters' ability to modify patterns to fit their own requirements. On the wholesale or commodity market, yarns were standardized according to weight and ply and each manufacturer produced a selection of yarns within these standard categories. In a project pattern calling for 3ply wool knitting worsted, a knitter could use any of a number of manufacturer's yarns. With

³³ This is why Jack Bodi's 1953 jumbo cotton sweaters would not have worked as wool sweaters, unless the patterns were severely modified to reflect wool's differing qualities in weight, shape retention, and elasticity.

brand names yarns, a knitter needed more expertise, and a great deal more experience with both the original suggested yarn and the replacement yarn to successfully switch yarns and generate a successful project.

That experience with individual yarns was difficult to achieve and to capitalize on as manufacturers increasingly issued new and re-modeled yarns under new names each season. The 1954 *Vogue Knitting Book* pattern “Two Piece Dress with Own Jacket” (Figure 3) cited above called for Bernat Corette yarn. A knitter would need to know that this yarn was 95% wool and 5% nylon³⁴ and either a sport or fingering weight, in order to make a successful substitution. The wrong fiber type or weight of yarn would likely have doomed the project completely. But the name ‘Corette’ could mean anything from a novelty ribbon yarn of 100% nylon or a very fine fuzzy French angora yarn and images of the finished garment were more interested in showing off a fashion item, rather than assisting a knitter in identifying a yarn type. The 1969 crochet project “Pullover Pants—a Quiver of Pompons” (Figure 6) called for Pauline Denham Fluida, with no further information provided, and the image is unhelpful in suggesting a fiber type of either cotton, angora, nylon, wool, acrylic, polyester, or some combination of blends. This was crucial information in successfully substituting one yarn for another. This yarn branding in the individual projects may have been a very successful strategy in encouraging knitters to purchase new yarn for each project but it was hardly conducive to generating and increasing a knitter’s general knowledge and experience across multiple projects.

³⁴ Carol Curtis, *Complete Book of Knitting and Crocheting* (New York: Pocket Books Cardinal Edition, 1954), 210. This text included an extensive appendix listing of brand name yarns with brief descriptions, which functions as a useful snapshot of knitting materials just prior to the widespread introduction of synthetic yarns.

An increased breadth and depth of knowledge might be expected within book publications, rather than the knitting periodicals, but the few hand knitting books published between 1949 and 1960 were often heavily influenced by industry groups such as the Institute for Handknitting, and follow much in the same footsteps as the periodical publications.³⁵ These include an emphasis on a finished project generated out of commercial sewing principles and process, and little or no information regarding the fiber type. The use of name brand yarn was discouraging to independent knitting and such dependence was often encouraged by frequent warnings against yarn substitutions and encouragements to consult an expert if in difficulties. Such titles as *Betty Cornell's Teen-Age Knitting Book* (1953) were more focused on teaching teenaged girls a gender appropriate activity suitable for impressing young men with their domesticity and style. Betty Cornell was a popular non-fiction writer on teen issues whose preoccupation with teaching middle class gender appropriate behaviors was evident with such titles as *Betty Cornell's Glamour Guide for Teens* (1951, 1958, 1963, 1966), *Teen Age Popularity Guide* (1953, 1955), *So You're going to*



Figure 6. "Pullover Pants" *Vogue Knitting Book*, Fall-Winter, 1969 (Conde Nast) 39.

³⁵ My sense that the decade of the 1950s was an impoverished period for knitting book publications in the US is supported both by the lack of texts in *the Workbasket* book reviews and by the odd pattern of republishing older texts. Several titles from the late 1940s were brought into new editions in 1960 and 1961, and often without any updating of information regarding synthetic yarns. There were simply very few single-author, non-industry based, knitting books published in this period in the US, though both English and Australian book publishing appears to be stronger.

be a Teen (1963) and *All About Boys* (1958). *Carol Curtis Complete Book of Knitting and Crocheting* (1954), written by Marguerite Maddox, covered very little new ground in terms of general knitting principles beyond what was available in periodical publication. Maddox, who also published a book on curtains, slipcovers and upholstery (1962), included only 20 pages of general knitting information in her 200 pages (Cardinal Paperback Edition) before focusing on projects and other textile practices, and little of that information did not also appear in most magazines. Books, by and large, covered very little new ground in knitting in this period with only a few exceptions.

This period did see three books that stepped out of these standardized presentations. Ida Riley Duncan was a significant knitting author and Home Economics professional who remained firmly within the industrial-commercial paradigm for contemporary knitters with its firm separation between industry professionals and consumer knitters. Two other author knitters, Barbara Abbey and Virginia Bellamy Woods, struck out in new directions for design and practice. These three texts all have interesting ties to Elizabeth. Duncan espoused a kind of expert shopkeeper/designer instruction with a firm boundary between expert and ordinary knitter that Elizabeth found stifling of her own independence in design and practice. Abbey's early text on nuances of the knitting process for the intermediate and advanced knitter was much admired by Elizabeth who worked to keep the text in print. Virginia Bellamy Woods became a significant garter stitch design influence on Elizabeth in her late designing period.

Ida Riley Duncan's two books, *The Complete Book of Progressive Knitting* and *Knit to Fit: A Comprehensive Guide to Hand and Machine Knitting*, were strongly supportive of the industrial commercial authority and acted as textbooks for certifying

entrance into professional practice. Duncan's pedagogical and professionalizing role was formalized by her own status as a Home Economics professional, prominently displayed in both publications with title page credentials of "Formerly, Assistant Professor, Home Economics Depart. Wayne State University".³⁶ Duncan's text was to be productive of professional shop keepers and knit designers based in professional dressmaking and not necessarily productive of good general knitters. Like many in the Home Economics profession, Duncan was clearly gatekeeping valuable specialist information in order to maintain a strong professional identity boundary between shopkeeper/designer and the general knitter/consumer. Duncan was also clearly invested in knitting as productive of high fashion femininity and her shopkeepers were directed at an upper class, aspirational knitter similar to the audience for *Vogue Knitting*.

Originally published in 1940, and reprinted in 1961, 1966 and 1968, *The Complete Book of Progressive Knitting* offered a chapter on knitting history and on yarns before launching into a comprehensive treatment of drawing paper pattern pieces, and the use of charts in designing garments with various modifications according to taste and fit.³⁷ Her work was expressly and firmly based in the principles of dressmaking with heavy emphasis on producing pattern pieces with precise shaping directions and with repeated emphasis on fashionability and traditional femininity. Duncan's *Knit to Fit* (1963, 1966, 1970) draws on much of the same material for a very similar audience but was more overtly an organized and formal curriculum directed towards credentialing

³⁶ Ida Riley Duncan, *Knit to Fit: A Comprehensive Guide to Hand and Machine Knitting* (Liveright Publishing Corp. 1966), title page.

³⁷ Ida Riley Duncan, *The Complete Book of Progressive Knitting: The fundamentals of knitting* (Liveright Publishing Corp. 1966), title page.

professionalism in both teaching and designing knitting. Her uniform chapters came complete with homework assignments and an appendix of correct responses. She identifies her readers as future shop owners, designers and teachers of knitting, encouraging them to be discreet with their professional knowledge and careful of their “prestige” (a frequent word choice) : “Of course, you won’t say exactly how you arrived at the figures (for customizing fit)....You’ll be surprised at the prestige you will gain. Satisfied customers bring other customers.”³⁸ She discourages teaching or recommending lace knitting as detrimental to sales: “...it is advisable to steer clear of intricate lace patterns. In the first place, it is in the sales of materials that one’s livelihood depends, and fine yarn where little weight is used, means less material. Secondly, shaping with lace patterns is often difficult for the layman.”³⁹ This term of “layman” makes clear Duncan’s professional boundary between her audience and the ordinary knitter. Duncan’s goal is the preparation of shopkeepers and designers for a professional industry market place and not the general advancement of the knitter in personal practice, and her line between the two entities was firmly established and enforced. Elizabeth Zimmermann was to meet with such well-educated and professional shopkeepers in Germany and, despite her initial delight at comprehensive guidance for her knitting, was later to identify this firm demarcation between instructor and knitter as a serious impediment to her own independence practice as a knitter.

Elizabeth was to find the two other texts to be much more beneficial. The earlier of these two texts, *Susan Bates Presents 101 Ways to Improve Your Knitting*, (1949,

³⁸ Ida Riley Duncan, *Knit to Fit*, 3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

1962), was connected to the needlework notions manufacturer Susan Bates but featured the author, Barbara Abbey, prominently.⁴⁰ The introduction identifies Abbey as a lifelong knitter whose knitting hobby overtook her first career as a concert violinist/violist, and led her to a second career as a teacher and designer at “the nationally known needlework headquarters, Alice Maynard, Inc., in New York City.”⁴¹ The introduction in the 1962 edition furthers the identification of Abbey as an artist by referring to her current location for helping “customers” at “her own knitting studio” in Pell Lake, WI.⁴² *Susan Bates* established Abbey as both professional and artistic, while Abbey herself allied with neither of the more common motivations but with that of self-expression, claiming: “Knitting is a form of expression. Not everyone can be an artist, writer or composer, but if you can take yarn and fashion from it an article that is serviceable and attractive, you have created a masterpiece of practical art.”⁴³ Both Abbey and Susan Bates, Inc. took care to emphasize the knitter and the knitting as artistic and self-expressive. This was one of the very few instances in which this minor motivation (not primarily fashion, function or economics) was articulated and prioritized. Yet Abbey’s own identification of her instructional purposes was equally unusual:

This is not purely an instruction book, nor is it written to teach the fundamental steps of using needles and yarn to make a piece of knitted material. Its purpose is to help the knitter avoid the numerous little traps which lie in her path, to make her more independent of the instructor and also to make the written instructions in knitting books easier to understand and interpret.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ This connection between a notions manufacturer and designer was highly unusual and allowed Abbey to address yarn issues without concern for a sponsoring yarn manufacturer’s sensibilities.

⁴¹ Barbara Abbey, *Susan Bates Presents 101 Tips to Improve Your Knitting*. (New York: Studio Publications, 1949) 7.

⁴² Ibid. (1962 edition).

⁴³ Ibid., 11, (1949 edition), 10 (1962 edition).

⁴⁴ Ibid., (1962 edition) 9.

Abbey's brief 61 pages included only two projects for garments (2 sock patterns) but instead focused on the nuances of material and practice that allowed a knitter to develop a variety of options for each design issue within a project. Her 'improving' text offered expertise far beyond the basics offered in other periodicals and texts.

This effort to make the ordinary knitter more independent of instruction, outside of the professionalizing boundaries of the approved authorities of publication and instructor, was novel in the knitting literature of the period and its audience of intermediate level knitters was largely ignored otherwise. Abbey's intention to make individual knitters independent of professional authorities conflicts with Ida Riley Duncan's attempts to establish professional boundaries between expert professionals and the ordinary knitter on the basis of specialist knowledge. Such texts mentioned earlier focused entirely on the most elementary skills. Abbey, instead, focused on the nuances of notions, yarns and techniques for fitting, knitting and finishing projects, explaining how to follow the directions of patterns, and multiple variations suitable for different purposes. These are the skills and techniques that might begin to form the personal collection of the increasingly competent, and eventually expert knitter. Most manufacturers had no interest in encouraging their knitting consumers to independence. Barbara Abbey was the earliest voice in American knitting identifying knitting as self-expressive in its functionality, within the context of an artist-knitter capable of greater independence from patterns and authorities.

The second text was likewise radically oriented. Virginia Woods Bellamy was such a "rebel against knitting" that she invented a completely new structure for knitting in

her 1952 *Number Knitting: the New All-Way Stretch Method* (Crown Publishers) and received a patent US Patent No. 2,435,068) for her “method and products produced”.⁴⁵ Appalled by urgings to purchase more yarn (and at her difficulty in returning unused yarn), Bellamy set out to develop a method of knitting that used very much less wool, and yet retained the airy drape and lofty warmth so desirable in the fiber. By including multiple increase and decrease lines across the fabric, by knitting in small pieces which were then ‘picked up’ along the side and continued (generating a kind of seam line) and by limiting herself to a single stitch type (garter stitch), Woods was able to design a variety of garments that were extraordinarily light while remaining stable enough for ordinary wear. Bellamy seems to have been the first published knitter to understand that garter stitch was the only stitch that was ‘square’, that is, equal in width and height. This was a key point in Elizabeth’s own later design work and she very much appreciated Bellamy’s work in this area. Yet the *Number Knitting* process was a completely different approach to knitting. While using the same notions and basic stitch, it required unique designs by the knitter beyond the limited number of basic projects included in the original text. A number knitter could not pick up any standard pattern and easily modify it for his or her use; a number knitter would need to re-design each item from scratch. This very much limited the appeal of *Number Knitting* to the general knitter and the text was difficult to find in the mid-seventies (according to Elizabeth herself) and is now difficult to find on the used book market.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Virginia Woods Bellamy, *Number Knitting*, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1952) 3, Copyright page.

⁴⁶ The used book market was my main source of publications. Early in my research, only 2 copies of *Number Knitting* were listed as available on Amazon, at over \$200 apiece. Two years later, I was able to purchase a copy through another collector for far less. As of Feb 24, 2016, a single copy is available on Amazon, priced at \$899.58.

These two knitting writers, Barbara Abbey and Virginia W. Bellamy, stood largely alone as rebels against the standard consumer model of American knitting in the early 1950s. Their methods of rebellion differed, with Abbey in relationship with an established manufacturer but claiming her identity as an artist and her audience of intermediate knitters reaching for design independence, and, with Bellamy's invention of her patented method of knitting that gave the knitter greater independence in materials and design. Yet the industry model of knitting grated as well on Elizabeth Zimmermann. Experienced as she was across the three knitting cultures of England, Germany and the United States, Elizabeth was well aware of other models of knitting and was feeling her way towards generating her own rebellion against the American model. It was a rebellion that had deep roots in her child- and young adult-hood in pre-war England and Germany, and in her own sense of knitting as an independent art form for an intelligent, artisan knitter.

1.2 Elizabeth Zimmermann in England, Europe and the United States: Issues around Class and Artistic Identity

This section will access various published and unpublished autobiographical writings of Elizabeth's to contextualize her early life with respect to those themes and techniques which were later to become significant in American knitting. These documents require some explanation. The earliest document, an unpublished 74 page manuscript Elizabeth called her "Digressions", was written between February 17, 1961, and July 9 or 10, 1964, as a family document to record her own memories, and those earlier family history stories told to her as a child. This manuscript was later enlarged

upon, edited and published by Schoolhouse Press as the 1989 text *Knitting Around*.⁴⁷

This situation created then two distinct but clearly related documents: Elizabeth's own manuscript pages from 1961, the "Digressions" and her family's enlarged and edited version in the published *Knitting Around*.

The third document in significant use in this section is an unpublished manuscript tentatively called "the Lost Document," discovered by the researcher in the archives and previously unknown to Schoolhouse Press or the Zimmermann family. This 320 page document, written by Elizabeth between January 1, and August 31, 1971, was intended to be a first draft of her second book, *Knitter's Almanac*, but was largely scrapped by Elinor Parker, Elizabeth's editor at Scribner's.⁴⁸ The "Lost Document", shaped as a dated daily written essay, is a treasure trove of Elizabeth's writings on knitting techniques, theory, and philosophy, as well as family stories and memories of great sweetness and charm. It provides documentation around a number of Elizabeth's concerns but most notably a long, multi-entry essay on the three knitting cultures of her life, and a shorter essay on her fears and trepidations around immigration to the US. These three sources form the basis for my work on Elizabeth's life and work prior to 1955, and offer a number of insights into her family history and her emotional and artistic life. While Elizabeth's memories of her natal family's issues around class boundaries are included in *Knitting Around*, the

⁴⁷ Meg Swansen and Lloie Schwartz (daughters of Elizabeth Zimmermann) in conversation with the author, at Schoolhouse Press, Pittsville Wisconsin, July 10, 2012. The writing and publication of *Knitting Around* was a matter of some urgency for the Zimmermann family in the late 1980s as Elizabeth was showing alarming signs of forgetfulness and mental confusion in her aging and the family wished to capture as many of her memories and stories as possible. In fact, the family efforts in publishing *Knitting Around* in the summer of 1989 led to the cancellation of Knitting Camp that year. It was the only lapse in this annual knitter's gathering since its inception in 1974 to the present day.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Zimmermann-Elinor Parker Correspondence, dated August 7, September 29, and November 27, 1971. Schoolhouse Press Archives. Pittsville, WI.

more personal reflections regarding Elizabeth's musings on the intersections between class, and her mother's business ambitions as an early English feminist remained unpublished in the *Digressions* manuscript.⁴⁹

These issues around class and gender were strongly tied, for Elizabeth, with issues around feminism and the independence of the artistic identity, and deeply embedded, as for many of us, in early family structures. These early experiences with the slippery nature of class mobility, while troubling as a school-aged child, cemented her lifelong identification as artistic and were likely powerful contributing sources of both her later independence as a knitting designer, and her ability to comfortably communicate so effectively across such a wide variety of venues and to such diverse audiences.

Furthermore, Elizabeth's antipathy towards her mother's practices of feminism, despite Elizabeth's own independence in professional practices and her exhortations to self-expression and autonomy, intersects with her own ambivalence around intellectual property rights in her later years as a mature designer within a relatively naïve professional community in the nineteen-eighties. This examination across multiple sources is crucial to understanding the long trajectory of multiple themes within Elizabeth's early life, her later work, and her influence on American knitting.

Elizabeth's early family life in England was very much dominated by the shifting class and gender boundaries of British society in the early twentieth century. Born in 1910 to an upper middle class family, Elizabeth's immediate family was to struggle (ultimately unsuccessfully) to retain that position. The family economic struggle

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Zimmermann, "The Digressions: February 16, 1962" [unpublished manuscript,] 32. Schoolhouse Press Archives. Pittsville, WI.

intersected with class-defined gender roles as her mother transgressed traditional gender and class boundaries and entered into business in her effort to ameliorate their financial circumstances and to afford her daughters the traditional lifestyle of upper class boarding schools in England and on the continent. This tense situation of a transgressive mother attempting to provide a traditional situation for her daughter was key to Elizabeth's embrace of an artistic identity in her efforts to resolve the class and gender tension.

Elizabeth's younger years were spent at a variety of summer and winter residences with her maternal relatives, the Greenwoods, and her paternal side, the Lloyd-Jones. These larger families were clearly upper-middle class with a number of servants. In her immediate family, "Mummy was supposed to be starting married life on a comparative shoestring, but until I was 12 there was Lizzie and Nanny, Mrs. Sackett for the heavy cleaning, the Laundry came for the dirty clothes, and on occasion a Mrs. Whoosis to do the sewing".⁵⁰ Elizabeth identified her mother's meeting with the cook as "the really tough moment of the day" in her early married life but the later decline in living standards led to "Poor Mummy. All this was to stop for her. Instead of servants becoming more plentiful and leisure more elaborate, servants dwindled to Mrs. Sackett, and then to nothing, and she was doing her own washing in a non-electric machine."⁵¹ Elizabeth's father, Herbert Lloyd-Jones, had served in the British Navy during World War I but by 1919, was "Poor Pop, he never really had a career but puttered and frittered along like a great many 'ex-officers' of that day" with "a little money between them, some of it tied up in trust; enough to keep us scratching along, but not enough to pay

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Zimmermann, *Knitting Around* (Schoolhouse Press: Marshfield WI, 1989) 63.

⁵¹ Ibid.

boarding-school bills for a trio of girls and to run a house with servants.”⁵² This slide out of a leisured social class, and the remedies to this slide attempted by the family, were to be the source of what appears to be a fairly uncomfortable school life for Elizabeth.

While a number of “schemes” were attempted by her father,⁵³ it was Elizabeth’s mother, Grace Muriel Greenwood Lloyd-Jones, who took charge of the family fortunes and left Elizabeth in her uncomfortably ambiguous social class position. Grace Lloyd-Jones, in 1919, entered into business, despite her upbringing but with the approval and financial support of her natal family, the Greenwoods, and began a commercial kitchen with meal delivery service. Originally known as the Community Kitchen, it became Meals by Motor and eventually had several regional branches. While able by 1989 to recognize her mother’s efforts as “quite an outstanding achievement”⁵⁴, Elizabeth, as a boarding school girl, at Oaklea School at Buckhurst Hill in Epping Forest in 1923, suffered from embarrassing parents:

It was a quite miserable time, and all I really wanted to do was stay in Birchington and go to the public central school in Margate. The girls at Oaklea were, I suppose, nearly all the children of professional middle class families and I felt it necessary to go to enormous pains to hide the fact that my parents were in trade. I could not have friends to stay with me, and when my parents came to school I was of course ashamed of them....My stinky old Pop really went out of his way to be difficult and would only appear in a disgracefully dirty old Burberry and a shabby cloth cap, making off-beat remarks and showing us up in front of the mistresses....My mind boggles now at how skilled in class consciousness we and all our schoolmates were.⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 64.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 66-67.

Elizabeth's uncomfortable social status at Oaklea among her peers was compounded by homemade clothing and a lack of skill at games but she spent a great deal of her time drawing, knitting, and writing "corny little poems" and became "branded as 'artistic' and, though unpopular, was nevertheless conceited as ever."⁵⁶ Despite her claim to unpopularity, Elizabeth did make friends with other girls, notably Moire Atkinson and Marjorie Smardon. Moire Atkinson, at least, struggled with similar family class issues as her father was merely the town-clerk of Walthamstow, a position which Moire and Elizabeth felt had "rather low connotations."⁵⁷ These memories published in *Knitting Around* (1989) form a somewhat measured public face to her childhood struggles.

Elizabeth's memories of this period were given greater personal force in the unpublished 'Digressions' of 1961 and tie very explicitly into her thoughts on contemporary American feminism of that period. Despite her 1989 ability to recognize her mother's achievement, Elizabeth, in 1961, revealed a deeper sense of resentment at her parents' choices around their financial and family difficulties. She wished that her mother had been less exercised in providing "class advantages" and more about family warmth and kindness.⁵⁸ Elizabeth described her mother as intent on becoming a "career woman" rather than staying at home awaiting an arranged marriage, while her father was dominated and infantilized by his father's preoccupation with class security.⁵⁹

You see Mummy was the epitome of the new woman, then just coming into fashion. She was nothing more than a goddam feminist, while I am a masculinist from the word go. If somebody has to rule the roost, and men are fools enough to be it, let them go to it with my blessing, poor devils. But

⁵⁶ Ibid., 66.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 67.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Zimmermann, "The Digressions: February 16, 1962" [unpublished manuscript,] 33. Schoolhouse Press Archives. Pittsville, WI.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 32.

Mummy was convinced of the superiority of her sex and set out to prove it from an early age.”⁶⁰

Elizabeth continued to describe her mother, with she “must have been very pretty” and,

“a stately height from which she could look down on poor bedazzled Pop. Pretty soon she was to look down on him spiritually too, which effectively drowned any spark of enterprise and backbone which old man Lloyd-Jones had left in his son. And there in a nutshell you have the sad life of my parents.”⁶¹

While it is an obvious statement, Elizabeth’s childhood was highly formative of her later feelings around class, feminism and self-expression through creative pursuits. Like many others, Elizabeth rejected her mother’s efforts at independence of class and gender strictures while following a similar and far more successfully independent path in her own life. It is one of founding and enduring tensions in Elizabeth’s life that while she claims an anti-feminist position for herself, her design philosophy exhorted independence of thought and intelligence, and the exercise of agency in the individual knitter, and many of her readers/students found her work liberating on a scale far beyond the simple act of knitting. Yet it is seldom that scholars have such a clear and direct personal statement by a subject: Elizabeth did not consider herself a feminist.

The class issues that bedeviled her family’s social life, and a level of anti-German sentiment, entered as well into Elizabeth’s knitting life even at a young age. Elizabeth grew up surrounded by knitting in both sides of her family, recalling “One of my earliest memories has always been of a day when I pestered my mother to teach me how to knit. The female half of my mother’s family knitted uninterruptedly, and they rather scorned

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

the females of my father's family who knitted exclusively mats and potholders."⁶² She recounts in *Knitting Around* her affectionate memories of being allowed to work her maternal Auntie Pete's sock overnight on "four of the skinniest little double pointed needles" during the early years of World War 1 but by late 1918, Elizabeth was caught between a Swiss baby nurse, Helene Forney, hired to care for her youngest sister Pringle, and Elizabeth's own English governess, Miss Barrett.⁶³ The English style of knitting requires that the yarn be held and fed from the ball by way of the right hand. Helene Forney knit in what is currently called the continental, or German, method which requires the working yarn to be held and tensioned in the left hand. Elizabeth, already skilled at the English right-hand method, demanded to be taught this new method by Miss Forney, and set about becoming proficient. Miss Barrett's outrage over Forney's "German way to knit" led to an immediate ban on the continental style but Barrett's influence was to end with her short term as governess.⁶⁴ Forney's lengthier employment with the family over many years led to Elizabeth's complete conversion to the Continental style despite Barrett's concerns about its un-English connections. It was a style of knitting that came to be one of the most important and enduring of the innovations Elizabeth introduced to American knitters from her first article on Norwegian sweaters in 1955 for *Woman's Day*.

Beyond the anxiety about German knitting styles, the class issues surrounding knitting were also made clear to Elizabeth in relationship to her family's servants. Elizabeth's maternal grandfather was Benjamin Isaac Greenwood, a "prosperous old

⁶² Zimmermann, *Knitting Around*, 47.

⁶³ Ibid., 49.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 50.

boy” with a “spectacular place” called Coombe Hollow in Kent, with “7 bedrooms (at least), an indoor fountain in the hall, an downstairs breakfast room, dining-room, study, lounge, drawing-room, and glass-room-full-of-flowers, not to mention twenty acres of strongly sloping meadows with two cows and endless glass houses.”⁶⁵ While Elizabeth clearly remembered her mother’s artistically talented mother, known as Auntie Granny Grace, with deep fondness and gratitude, it was Benjamin Greenwood’s rather unpopular second wife, Alice Passmore, who intervened in the young Elizabeth’s textile work. Elizabeth had developed a “new passion for crochet” but Auntie Alice “suggested...a return to knitting, since crochet was just ‘done by servants.’”⁶⁶ This stricture against crocheting seemed to have more lasting effect than that on using the Germanic left hand in knitting as Elizabeth’s later work shows a disinclination to include crochet in her own work, even as borders or edgings to knitted garments, though she attributes this to a variety of reasons and recognizes her own personal idiosyncrasy on this topic.⁶⁷

Around age fifteen, Elizabeth left Oaklea School, and headed to Lausanne, Switzerland, to attend her mother’s old boarding school run by a Mademoiselle Pelichet, who

...had an arrangement with my mother that she would take me for free if my mother would whip up some English students for her. This arrangement did not work very well, so that I was for some time the only student until a mixed bag of German, Czechoslovakian, and some English students trickled in.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ibid., 64.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Elizabeth Zimmermann, *Knitter's Almanac*. (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1974). 63.

⁶⁸ Zimmermann, *Knitting Around*, 68.

Elizabeth's curriculum there seemed to feature primarily French lessons with the few other students and attendance in the afternoons at the local Lausanne art school. Her focus on artistic pursuits, earlier at Oaklea, and under the influence of artistic family members, but now more formally at Lausanne, seems again a means by which she could both explore her talents and sidestep her painful occupation of a class borderland in a society which preferred clear class boundaries.

Elizabeth's life in Europe, 1925-1937, beginning with her short period of a single year in Lausanne, was to be a rich period, encompassing both artistic and personal growth in which she blended her art school studies with professional levels of knitting, and furthered her independence into adulthood through both employment and study.⁶⁹ Elizabeth considered her art studies in Lausanne with Monsieur Rambert to be very helpful, and noted in *Knitting Around* that it was here that she was finally able to "stand upright before a real easel with a genuine palette over my left arm."⁷⁰ But she quickly became ambitious for the higher quality training available in Munich. In her published memoirs, Elizabeth related her naiveté in attempting to enter the Munich Akademie of Art before realizing that she would need some time at a preparatory training school. She quickly realized her situation and began study, in 1927, at the Heymannschule, in

⁶⁹ It is important at this point to clarify my use of the term 'artistic' and 'artist', as distinct from Elizabeth's use of the title "artist". Among American craftspeople there has long been an acrimonious and troubled relationship with the terms and much academic ink has been shed in discussing the hierarchical positions of art and craft in American values around creativity. It must be made clear that Elizabeth only rarely used the term 'artist' in any respect. She certainly did not call herself an artist according to Meg Swansen. This should not be taken as a value judgment on her part as Meg also notes that Elizabeth never referred to the very influential and successful oil painting artists of Arnold's family as 'artists'. She preferred the more precise (and less value laden) term of "painters". Elizabeth, as I shall show, certainly considered her work equal to the other traditional craft forms and spoke and wrote frequently of knitting self-expressive and creative possibilities, but she did not refer to herself as an artist.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 69.

Munich, with about 30 other students. In her first Munich winter of 1927, as a result of a minor skiing accident, Elizabeth met her future husband, Arnold Zimmermann. She remained studying with Herr Heymann for only a year before meeting, through the Zimmermann family's strong artistic connections⁷¹, Professor Hesse of the Akademie, and, passing the entrance examination in 1928, began work at the Akademie itself in his class.⁷² The 1989 publication of *Knitting Around* included a number of Elizabeth's paintings and sketches.

Elizabeth's intellectual and artistic work at the Akademie and after was balanced by two forms of paid labor, as professional knitter for the local yarn shops, and, as English speaking companion to the children of a number of wealthy and aristocratic European and Scandinavian families. Elizabeth considered herself a proficient knitter in Germany and took up knitting for the shops as a means to supply herself with wool and generate a small income. She found it "very rewarding to see my knitted pieces exhibited in the shop window at pleasing prices."⁷³ Yet her knitting experiences in Germany did not ultimately serve her well, as she relates in her essay on the three knitting cultures discussed below.

In her work with the aristocratic families, Elizabeth again dealt with class issues. Yet, whereas Elizabeth's earlier school girl experience of class difference had been quite painful and lonely for her, this later experience in her twenties was clearly a source of adventure and friendship, even lifelong friendship. In 1932, Elizabeth was interviewed by

⁷¹ Arnold Zimmermann was a member of a very prominent painting family, originating with Reinhard Sebastian Zimmermann (1815-1893) but continuing to remain important and influential in the Munich art community through the 20th century. Meg Swansen, in conversation with the author, July 2012.

⁷² Ibid., 102.

⁷³ Ibid., 100.

the Countess Zeppelin for a position as the English speaking companion to the school-aged children of the Countess Eltz and the Prince Loewenstein, at their summer residence, “an impressive 5-story castle,” in Haid, Czechoslovakia.⁷⁴ She writes with fondness of her memories of learning to use finger bowls at formal dinners and she got on well with her young charges. She became so friendly with the family that she was invited by the children’s aunts (her own age-mates) the Princesses Therese and Marie-Anna, to continue on at the castle in Haid as their guest for a time after the younger children returned to winter quarters and school. Later in 1936, while waiting impatiently for Arnold to be ready financially to marry, Elizabeth took a similar job with the ethnic Swedish family of Baron Von Koskull in Kuusankoski, Finland. This relationship was to be maintained over the years as well, with Brita, the Baroness Von Koskull, later to visit the Zimmermann’s in Milwaukee. It was the Baroness who encouraged Elizabeth to submit her skills and interests to “the best US handknitting authority (*Vogue Knitting*).”⁷⁵ Elizabeth recalled these two periods with great enjoyment and excitement in her *Knitting Around* memoir. It is in the late winter of 1936, while Elizabeth was in Finland with the Von Koskulls, that Arnold, still in Munich, ran afoul of the local Nazi authorities and was forced to escape under cover of night across the border at Kiefersfelden into Austria and thence to Switzerland.⁷⁶ Upon hearing of Arnold’s situation through a friend, Elizabeth, who had been “deliberately out of touch with Arnold and the events in Germany” despite their engagement, reestablished contact with Arnold, finally in Brussels, Belgium where

⁷⁴ Ibid., 103.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 142.

⁷⁶ Arnold Zimmermann’s story of his escape from Nazi Germany while Elizabeth was working in Finland is interesting in its own right and is told in some detail in Zimmermann, *Knitting Around* pp. 142-145.

he was again working in brewing.⁷⁷ They decided to marry at once and immigrated to the United States in the fall of 1937.

The Zimmermann's move to New York City, and later Gardnerville, New York, and, most importantly, to New Hope, Pennsylvania, began another period of artistic growth for Elizabeth, and one due in part to the demands of her young family. This artistic growth grew, not out of stimulation of other knitters and knit designers but primarily out of a relative isolation from other accomplished knitters, and within a community of artists and artisans. Elizabeth's realization that her American knitting life would be very different from the two previous incarnations in England and Germany drove her to develop her own skills and a sense of design possibilities in knitting. This development initiated largely outside of the influence of mainstream American knitting in the twelve year period in which Elizabeth was tending to her young family and participating in the artists' community of New Hope, Pennsylvania.

While Elizabeth and Arnold's early time in New York seems relatively absorbed with the typical difficulties and pleasures of a young immigrant family of limited means, their time in New Hope, Pennsylvania, 1946-1949, seems markedly different in Elizabeth's memories. New Hope Pennsylvania was, and still is, an active artists' community and the Zimmermann's were fully participant in that community.⁷⁸ Elizabeth's design confidence began to grow and her work began to take shape in these years. Elizabeth also found new ways to think about her work and her choices around

⁷⁷ Ibid., 142.

⁷⁸ According to conversations with Meg Swansen, Elizabeth and Arnold were particularly close to the Japanese American wood worker, George Nakashima and his wife, and remained so long after the move to Milwaukee WI in 1949.

family and relationships. In the unpublished “Digressions” manuscript, Elizabeth wrote at some length about the extraordinary helpfulness of conversations with a Roger Stanier, in 1947. She credited Stanier with helping her come to a much greater sense of understanding and self-awareness about the impact of her own upbringing and family situation and wrote of her desire for self-awareness in her relationships and behavior.⁷⁹

Elizabeth analyzed her experiences in England, Germany and North America in an important essay included in the newly discovered first draft to *Knitters’ Almanac*. Living in England, Germany and North America, Elizabeth had three distinct models of knitting culture and, in this 1971 manuscript, she reflected on these three influences on her knitting. In England, Elizabeth claimed, “one knits as one breathes” from a very early age⁸⁰ and “all Englishwomen have knitting bags, and they take them nearly everywhere.”⁸¹ In England, yarn shopkeepers were not expected to also provide instruction and, according to Elizabeth,

Any help and instructions are instantly available from mother, aunts, or grandmother, who, in turn, learned from their loving families. There are instruction books, but these one takes with a grain of salt, as tastes vary. ...In my youth, then, I considered myself absolutely the boss of my knitting.⁸²

Elizabeth was to find this confidence somewhat misplaced when she went to Germany.

In England real knitting knowledge resided in family and community. In Germany the situation was much different. The knitting authority and expertise of Germany resided in the shopkeeper: “In Germany I found out that each knit-shop contained an expert

⁷⁹ Zimmermann, “The Digressions”, 69. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

⁸⁰ Elizabeth Zimmermann, “the lost documentt: January 27-28, 1971” (unpublished manuscript at Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville WI), 29.

⁸¹ Ibid., 30.

⁸² Ibid. Elizabeth’s underlining.

knitter, who could tell one how to knit, stitch for stitch, to produce a perfect garment.”⁸³

Unlike the casual offers and acceptance of help by family and friends in England, the German shopkeeper’s professional expertise was exclusive to her wool customers.

Elizabeth related her horror at asking for assistance and having her knitting pushed aside in refusal “as if it smelled” because she had not purchased the wool in that knit shop.⁸⁴

I never dared go into that shop again, but I went into other shops, bought my wool and received the most expert instructions I have ever had anywhere. They would actually take a large sheet of brown paper, draw the sweater-pieces on it with masterly sweeps of the hand, and mark every single decrease or increase. It was inspiring, and my independence of knitting instructions melted like snow in spring.⁸⁵

This description of the German shopkeepers charting out pattern pieces is extraordinarily similar to Ida Riley Duncan’s prescriptions for professional shopkeepers as able to provide customized fitting instructions to their customers while retaining an air of rather complete authority over the individual knitter. Elizabeth eventually became proficient enough as a knitter in Germany to knit professionally for the shops but the expertise of the German knitting instructors was not without a personal cost, and Elizabeth was headed for America, where things were very different, again.

The cost for Elizabeth was in her knitting skills and confidence. “Arriving in the US, then, so many years ago now, I had lost the knitting independence of my youth, and came to believe slavishly in any shop-dispensed or even printed directions. My knitting suffered, as the local wool ladies were not up to the high German standard...”⁸⁶ Yet, Elizabeth was resilient and

⁸³ Ibid., 31.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

...it occurred to me that one might experiment with using one's own brains, instead of picking those of others. The result was that our children gradually started to possess better-fitting sweaters (and stockings, and cute knitted shorts) than other liddle kids (sic). The designs were usually original with me. I was advised to try and market some of my ideas, to which I replied that this was dandy with me if I could find a nice understanding agent who would handle the haggling and correspondence for a modest percentage. So that is where matters rested for quite a time...⁸⁷

Elizabeth's time on the east coast, spent among other immigrant families, and the artists and artisans of New Hope, and driven by her English soul to cloth her children in wool, was a period of integration for her skills and creative ideas. It is in this early period with young children that some of Elizabeth's most enduring designs were originally developed including the Tomten Jacket. She described her situation, in a slightly different version from that above:

I knew from my English upbringing that the moment Tom was born, he should be well supplied with knitted woolen garments, and I started off with several small jackets and sweaters, gradually leading up to a pair of longies, at this point not at all frequently observed in the US. Thomas' Tomten jacket was also ahead of its time in this country; a reminiscence of something I'd observed in Scandinavia.⁸⁸

It is clear that Elizabeth was finding new directions in her knitting since coming to the United States but still largely drawing on her English and German experiences, and on her own training and life as a painter/craftsman, rather than engaging with American knitters. Impelled by necessity, and still somewhat isolated from mainstream American knitters amidst her artist's community, she reclaimed her English confidence and molded

⁸⁷ Ibid., 31-32. Elizabeth often indulged in phonetic spelling of American pronunciations or outright slang. She was fascinated by such pronunciations as 'liddle', and 'purdy', and such slang terms as 'argle bargle' and used such language frequently.

⁸⁸ Zimmermann, *Knitting Around*, 161.

it to her German taught expertise to begin her own designing period, even if as yet unpublished.

This time in the artists' community of New Hope was to close in 1949 with the closing of Trenton Oldstock Brewery and the ending of Arnold's employment there. Arnold's new position with the Joseph Schlitz Brewing Company necessitated the move to Milwaukee, and Elizabeth, according to Meg Swansen, was deeply distressed about losing her creative community and the move to an upper class suburban setting.⁸⁹ Elizabeth's sense of loss for the New Hope arts community was probably a strong motivating factor in her generation of new artistic connections in Milwaukee, through their membership in the Walrus Club, a local Milwaukee social club with arts connections, her campaign to be allowed to exhibit as a member of the Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen, and in her work with the local knitters in Shorewood.

It is after their 1949 move to Shorewood, a suburb of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, that Elizabeth began to interact with American knitting and knitters in what might be called their natural habitats of friends and neighbor's living rooms and the local yarn shop. Elizabeth, for the first time, began to understand how middle class suburban American knitters learned to knit, accessed new patterns, skills and knowledge, and obtained materials. Her surprised enjoyment at the sociability of her new suburban situation is apparent in various writings but in her unpublished 1961 'Digressions' and while still living in Shorewood, Elizabeth made clear both her misgivings about immigration, her

⁸⁹ Meg Swansen, in personal conversation with the author, July 2012.

imagined life-to-be on the east coast, and her eventual deep appreciation for the American Midwest:

If I had known then about the United States what I know now, I would have greeted the statue of Liberty that bleak November in '37 with glad cries, instead of rather apprehensive gloom, my ideas of this country having been gleaned from the movies, and from her traveling citizens.

I was convinced that we should live in a shabby brownstone walkup with four families sharing one smelly john, that we should spend our summers panting on the front steps, or walking along something called a boardwalk eating popcorn and cotton candy, and our vacations to a landscape strongly resembling the Jersey Flats. I knew we could never aspire to cadillacs (sic), estates on Long Island, and the cool Adirondacks in the hot months.

That there was a spacious, hospitable, warm, friendly middleland between these extremes with lovely landscapes and good neighbors, somehow escaped me.⁹⁰

Elizabeth's sense of relief over finding her new situation in the Midwest, and the sense that she hadn't much known or appreciated Americans much before the move to Shorewood WI in 1949, supports the idea that Elizabeth's earliest designing period was outside of the influences of mainstream of American knitting. Elizabeth was relying heavily on her English and German influences, and, on the tenacity and intelligence of her own mental and material experiments.

The Zimmermann's move to the suburbs did finally set Elizabeth into relationship with American knitters. As an immigrant, she was in a strong position to assess the state of American hand knitting and American hand knitters. She found it a frankly appalling situation. With her youngest child, Meg, growing to school age, Elizabeth began to frequent the Shorewood Yarn Shop owned by Sophie Stefanski, and spent

...morning after morning in there meeting local knitters, dropping little hints on them and, best of all, absorbing their hints. Helping them with

⁹⁰ Zimmermann, "the lost manuscript," 8. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

some of their puzzles and troubles... certainly taught me what a sad knitting life many knitters led, dependent on knitting instructions. These consisted chiefly of magazine articles which took for granted that their readers were familiar with technically-expressed and abbreviated 'directions' and were capable knitters to start with.⁹¹

Elizabeth's surprise at this state of affairs in American hand knitting was to be her impetus to share her own designs, and the source of her frustrated determination that the contemporary American model of knitting needed reformation. Yet it was these early years on her own that seem to have helped her rebuild her confidence and skills as a designer, becoming again the 'boss' of her knitting and determined to help American knitters become the boss of theirs.

⁹¹ Zimmermann, *Knitting Around*, 174.

CHAPTER 2. THE OPINIONATED KNITTER: NEGOTIATING AROUND DOMESTICITY, CRAFTSMANSHIP AND INDUSTRY

Elizabeth Zimmermann's interactions with American knitting took place on several distinct levels and intersected with multiple enduring social and cultural movements. As a mid-century, middle class, white, married-with-children woman with an overriding creative and professional passion, Elizabeth intersected with Feminism and the emerging national sense that women's lives and choices were too constricted by social customs and cultural expectations, and by legal and administrative structures. As an original and technically proficient designer/knitter, she intersected with the contemporary craft movement, which struggled with its own definitions of 'craftsperson' within a very long tradition of craft as culturally productive of identity and resistance. As a designer, Elizabeth intersected with a knitting industry ill prepared for facilitating changes in knitting as their knitting audience evolved around the social movement of women in the period.

This looping set of interactions (between Elizabeth's personal situation within domesticity and her emerging professionalism, her professional struggle for recognition as a studio craftsperson, and her frustration in offering new techniques and conceptualizations of knitting to an industry built upon a traditionally passive knitting consumer) offers us a view of an emerging professional craftsperson, content herself within a strong traditional marriage and family structure, yet who was leading a radical

makeover of the knitting industry that paralleled the radical remaking of women's lives in the period. Elizabeth was herself quite happy in her traditional relationships but her work was built upon a knitter's right to choice, and the accessibility of information and materials that would allow intelligent choices in craftsmanship. This new conceptualization of knitting as craftsmanship exposed American knitters to a new opportunity for the formation of identity, just as American women were awakening to the idea that their social and cultural identities might be in need of reformation.

It is a paradox that a craft that might be so easily dismissed as inextricably tied to traditional domesticity could also be a deeply liberating activity, and it was Elizabeth's insistence on knitting as craftsmanship, instead of as the blind following of industry provided patterns, that reshaped American knitting and American knitters towards its liberating potential. Knitting, like all craftsmanship, and cultural production in general, offers its practitioners a series of choices to be made by the producer balanced individually and personally between tradition and innovation. It is both essentially conservative in its value for traditional materials and practices, and in its reliance of the pre-existing identity, ethos, and aesthetics of the practitioner, and inherently liberating in its value for originality, creativity, and for its ability to offer an individual a physical and therefore manipulate-able and malleable expression of that identity.

Scholarship on craft, and needlework in particular, as a site of identity formation abounds. Roszika Parker's foundational text, *The Subversive Stitch*, documents the historical use of needlework as the performance site of both traditional and subversively

transgressive feminine identities and conceptualizations.⁹² In their essay, “The Needle as the Pen,” Heather Pristash, Inez Schaechterle and Sue Carter Wood claim needlework as a form of epideictic rhetoric, a ritualized form of discourse for the purpose of “inculcating commonly held values” but with a “visionary quality” among skilled practitioners that “helps its audience to imagine possibilities that need to be enacted in the world”.⁹³ Fiona Hackney, among many others, draws strong historical connections between contemporary Craftivism and the history of British home and hobby crafts, and discusses at length craft’s ability to offer a flexible space for the exploration of identity and its performance in contemporary culture.⁹⁴ It is simultaneously a space for “radical play” in imagining a vastly different social and economic space⁹⁵, a quietly self-expressive alternative space in which to speak and to “stake out a place” on the social and cultural stage,⁹⁶ and a conservative space⁹⁷ wherein highly traditional forms of class, gender, and socio-cultural understandings could be maintained.

This flexibility in craft is visible in the person of Elizabeth herself, a woman unleashing an enormously accessible popular practice for the examination of and reformation of intimate identity, and yet quite happily content to remain a traditional and

⁹² Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*. (London: Women's Press, 1996).

⁹³ Heather Pristash, Inez Schaechterle and Sue Carter Wood, “The Needle as the Pen: Intentionality, Needlework, and the Production of Alternate Discourses of Power” in *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750-1950*. Ed. by Mary D. Goggin and B. F. Tobin, (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009), 14-15.

⁹⁴ Fiona Hackney, “Quiet Activism and the New Amateur: The Power of Home and Hobby Crafts.” *Design and Culture* 5, no. 2 (2013): 169-94.

⁹⁵ Meinolf, Travis Joseph. “Common Goods.” *Utopian Studies* 22, no. 2 (2011): 356.

⁹⁶ Walker, Rob. “Handmade 2.0.” *New York Times*, December 16, 2007. Accessed February 25, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/16/magazine/16Crafts-t.html>.

⁹⁷ J.C. Whittaker, *American Flintknappers: Stone Age Art in the Age of Computers*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013).

consciously “docile wife”.⁹⁸ In the narrative of white, middle-class feminism in this period, liberation meant the re-shaping of marriage and family relationships towards greater equality and independence for the woman, as well as opening new opportunities in the wider public world. Yet, while Elizabeth did feel some sense of constriction around her role as wife, she never expressed or seemed to experience any lack of equality or independence in her domestic relationships, instead finding them a constant source of support, inspiration and renewal in her business and professional work. This nuanced personal negotiation, over distinctly separate personal and professional liberations, visible in the collection of Elizabeth’s documents and publications at Schoolhouse Press, offers us a complex and finely grained example of an alternative version of a woman exercising agency, content within traditional understandings of marriage and motherhood while radically reinventing the cultural production practices of American knitters, and, eventually, much of the publication end of the American knitting industry. This retention of traditional social relationships in marriage and family coupled with the reach towards strong autonomy and agency in professional practice and cultural production illuminates the wide middle ground between two poles of traditional and liberated women in the United States in these decades.

This chapter will explore these complex aspects of Elizabeth’s Zimmermann’s encounter with American knitting after her move to Shorewood, Wisconsin, in 1949 through 1958, when her frustration with the knitting industry’s practices around design publication became acute. Elizabeth Zimmermann’s time on the east coast, as a young

⁹⁸ Elizabeth Zimmermann, “Lost Document: June 17, 1971” (unpublished manuscript), 219. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

woman, wife, mother and artist, introduced her to American artists in the colony at New Hope, Pennsylvania, while giving her a period of personal and artistic development in which to explore and develop her own design and production skills. When she was settled in Shorewood, following Arnold's career move to the Joseph Schlitz Brewing Company, Elizabeth found new opportunities for building on the creative work she had done in New Hope. This initial transition period from 1949 to 1958 was in many ways typical of any energetic and passionate studio crafts person, with Elizabeth pursuing production sales, exhibition opportunities and moving into the sales of craft materials, and producing articles and designs for publication.

Yet as simple and standard a studio practice as this may appear, it was very much a complex borderland period for Elizabeth and her knitting between motherhood and studio/business practices; between the pursuit of professional recognition from traditional crafts organizations, and between the practices of professional studio work and the practices of industrial design, and finally, between participating in the older paradigm of the yarn sales industry and addressing and developing a community of new artisan knitters . This period was so rich simply because it was a borderland of multiple communities and identities across multiple classes and avenues of expression. And Elizabeth had powerful skills in crossing those borders as the need arose.

It is clear in the archival record that Elizabeth felt very comfortable in moving back and forth between her domestic life and her emerging professional and business life. Elizabeth, consistently over the course of her career, connected her family life with her professional activity, firmly rooting professional accomplishments in a domestic base. This is exhibited most clearly in her own publications of *Newsletters* and books, but it

appears here in the earlier period as well, revealed in her unpublished writing and in various newspaper articles. These earlier sources offer us a glimpse of Elizabeth's domesticity and of her own prioritizing of elements of traditional marriage. Elizabeth clearly felt her primary role was that of wife and mother. Arnold may have understood a traditional role for himself as husband but this role included deep and active support for Elizabeth's pursuits. Elizabeth's full range of writings are rife with examples of Arnold's support for Elizabeth's work from proofreading her knitting directions, to crafting handmade buttons, to being a continual sounding board for her ideas and a testing site for her designs. Her origin stories for designs often featured how her children's wishes or growth patterns necessitated one or another development. Elizabeth's integration of domesticity in partnership with her creative, business and professional pursuits would remain a staple in her self-representations throughout her career.

A more difficult borderland was that between knitting and the traditional arts and crafts organizations of the period. While Elizabeth pursued the traditional activities of a studio craftsman, her pursuit of exhibition opportunities with the Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen organization was made difficult by their initial rejection of her work as artistic on the same level as glass, weaving, ceramics, jewelry, and wood. Easily acceptable as exhibition-worthy in a domestic handwork category, the crucial professional recognition of her work as craftsmanship was slower in coming through a state level professional organization that was itself coming to grips with evolving identity around craftsmanship.

Elizabeth's difficulty in being identified as a crafts person by the WDC was echoed in her difficulties in being a craftsman/designer in the commercial and industrial knitting industry. As a professional craftsperson, Elizabeth's designs were valued as

uniquely authored, whole objects; as an anonymous industry designer, Elizabeth's designs were merely a tool to yarn sales and could be altered at the whim of various authorities. As a craftsperson, Elizabeth offered her audience innovative principles of design and new methods of construction and technique that were deeply valued but these attributes were often unwelcome in the far more rigid structures of the yarn industry-publisher paradigm. Though Elizabeth was apparently able to easily integrate her domestic and professional life, and, eventually, convince the Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen of her practice of knitting as professional craft, it was this final conflict between the identity of craftsman and of designer that drove Elizabeth to bypass the knitting publications in her effort to speak to knitters themselves as she knew and imagined them. It was an imaginary quite different from the industry's imagined audience of their consumers.

By the 1949 move to Wisconsin, Elizabeth and Arnold's children, Tom, Lloie, and Meg, were school-aged and Elizabeth was more able to pursue her studio work and expand into production work with garment sales in both local clothing shops, and with the Women's Industrial Exchange in Milwaukee and the Women's Exchange in New York City. She and Arnold quickly became active in the local artists' social club, the Walrus Club, and Elizabeth began to look about herself for exhibition opportunities. As a practice of both domesticity and artisanship, her knitting had various venues for exhibition from the Home Show sections of the local and state fairs, to the exhibitions of the Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen. By the early 1950s, Elizabeth had begun to expand beyond simple studio production of garments to include mail-order retail sales of her raw materials with the importation and sale of wool yarns. In 1954 she began to sell garment

designs through traditional channels such as *Women's Day*, *McCalls*, and various industry publications. But she also began to maintain her own customer list through the yarn sales and kept in contact with her customers through a brief newsletter. Despite her great success in selling designs, her intense dissatisfaction with industry standard practices led her to generate an alternative method of communication with other knitters and she developed the small sheet of yarn sales information into a more fully developed knitting newsletter wherein she published both her own designs and instructions and began to develop and articulate her knitting philosophy for American knitters. It is in this period of intense professional activity, 1949 to the end of the 1950s, that Elizabeth developed both her innovative professional life and her articulation of her liberating knitting philosophy.

2.1 Domesticity and Professionalism

Elizabeth's positioning of herself around her family and her work as a creative entrepreneur was complex. She made several very conservative statements, particularly about her understanding of her role as Arnold's wife, but, and despite her own avowed antifeminism, she also took several positions that clearly situate her within a very recognizable form of liberal feminism. She expressed no need for personal liberation, though her desire for knitter-ly liberation was intense. She loved her professional work and spent many hours a day over decades in pursuing opportunities to improve her business position and to speak to knitters, but she never considered that she was herself a working woman or that the economic benefit from her labor was essential. The wealth of her archive, in both private writings for her family, in documents written for publication but unedited, and finally in publication, gives a full range of exposure to Elizabeth's

opinions on a variety of subjects, and like most of us, these opinions do not lay down quietly within the polarized historical social and cultural narratives of the period. Maggie Andrews speaks of feminist history as “a history of struggle, either covert or overt, with space for human agency”⁹⁹ within a “plurality of voices and a celebration of their simultaneous fragment and cohesion”¹⁰⁰ and inclusive of “a version of feminism which incorporates women who would not describe themselves as feminists, but who struggle in a variety of areas for improvements in the lives of women, or against male domination.”¹⁰¹ As such, Elizabeth is one of these multitudes of women who took a complex position regarding her family and work.

The complexity of her position is such that Elizabeth herself was perhaps a more socially conservative woman regarding family and marriage than those identities that were the result of her professional work might assume. Yet her recognition of her individual position was never prescriptive for other women, and her position on a number of issues was decidedly liberal. This complexity of identity, chosen from a rich array of possible intimate positions, mirrors the richly complex act of cultural production in craft itself as supportive of both conservative and liberating impulses.

Elizabeth’s conservative impulses were strongest around her relationship to her husband Arnold and it is through coverage of their activities in the Walrus Club, an artistic social club in Milwaukee, that we are afforded an early glimpse into the traditional domestic relations between them. In 1959, Arnold was the chair of the annual

⁹⁹ Maggie Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women's Institute as a Social Movement*. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1997). 5.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 6.

masked ball committee and his theme of Black and White was directly the result of his memories of a specific pre-war Twelfth Night Fasching Ball in Munich. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* article of February 24th, 1959, profiles Arnold Zimmermann in his role as committee chair and provides a fascinating glimpse into the balance of the relationship between the quieter Arnold and the more gregarious Elizabeth, just after their purchase of the schoolhouse property in very rural Babcock, in Northern Wisconsin.

The ball chairman is, as his wife put it, a man of parts. A brewmaster, a small game hunter, a man with a real flair for social enjoyment, and at the same time, a transplanted Bavarian, who relishes nothing more than his peace and quiet. While his wife talks rapidly and entertainingly on almost any subject...he listens serenely and injects a quiet comment now and then. 'Himself must have his royal Bavarian peace and quiet,' his wife said and chuckled. (She wears a 'peace and quiet' motto on a medallion around her neck.) 'We are hermits' she added. 'You are not,' he said mildly. 'I am when you are here,' she returned, 'when you are not here I go about. And when you are here I am a hermit too.'¹⁰²

Elizabeth's consent to Arnold's priority for 'peace and quiet' was coupled by her flexibility in meeting her own needs for more sociability in his absence. In another instance, from 1971, Elizabeth expressed an even greater conservatism regarding the husband as the head of the house hold. In a humorous retelling of a relatively insignificant event at the local electrical cooperative annual meeting and "beanfeast"¹⁰³ in rural Babcock, Wisconsin, Elizabeth uses language of outright submission but with her own opinions made clear.

I regret to say that we abandoned the festivities before the entertainment and the divvying out of a lovely lottery for free electrical appliances. The Old Man said greed for lotteries is unworthy of me, but I don't think a new icebox is unworthy of me, or that I am unworthy of a new icebox.

¹⁰² "Walrus Ball to have an Old World Air" *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 24, 1959.

¹⁰³ Elizabeth Zimmermann, "Lost Document: Thursday June 17, 1971" (unpublished manuscript), 219. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

However, peace and quiet and a docile wife are even more worthy aims.
So we left.¹⁰⁴

Elizabeth clearly recognized the role of husband as a final arbiter. Yet this language of submission is unique in my examinations of the archive, and there are far more statements regarding her high regard for independence in her children and husband. Her vehement distaste for the 1950s fashion of dressing young girls as pretty dolls made her preference for strong adventurous girls very clear:

When I see the female infant with white shoes and socks, permantly (sic) frizzed hair, and those awful stiff little hats and spring coats in at the waist, prancing off to church parade, I want to grab her, cut her hair short, give it a GOOD BRUSH, put her into jeans or a smock and sneakers, and dump her down in a meadow by a small stream, and just let her grow.¹⁰⁵

Elizabeth's own daughters clearly reveled as outdoor adventurers, with both spending time as professional ski instructors. And she had no compunction in allowing Arnold the consequences of his own choices. In the 1961-1964 memoirs written for her family only, Elizabeth recounts Arnold's crankiness around being caught without his cigarettes on a camping trip:

...we all have to go to inordinate lengths and trips by boat to procure them for him. You'd think he would have the elementary sense to buy them several cartons at a time before heading for the Canadian wilderness. Hey, here's an idea, why don't I take along a secret carton for emergencies? I'll tell you why; then he would expect me to supply him all the time, and crab like nobody's business when I failed him. No, thank you. It would only make for bad blood.¹⁰⁶

Clearly, Elizabeth felt the ability to rebuff some traditional expectations of wifely caretaking and there is no sense here of the cartoon-noir version of the submissive wife.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 220.

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Zimmermann, "Digressions" (unpublished manuscript) 4. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

¹⁰⁶ Zimmermann "Digressions", 39.

These nuanced conservative aspects to Elizabeth's self-positioning may serve to thicken our excavation of her feelings about her own emerging professionalism in tandem with her role as wife and mother. While she clearly took her creative work very seriously, her feelings about her business pursuits were far more lighthearted, and clearly secondarily important to her family relationships, and to the family economy. In 1961, and with 7 years of national design publication in her pocket, Elizabeth spoke of her business as a kind of play: "... which is picking up nicely, every year a little better than the year before, most exciting, and a wonderful proof that advertising is not really necessary, if one is only playing at keeping shop, and doesn't really care if one makes money or not."¹⁰⁷ In 1971, Elizabeth goes even further, in fact, fusing Arnold's retirement with her own at a time when she was packing and shipping her first book to her customers, working daily on a second book, producing her twice annual *Wool Gathering*, filling and shipping yarn orders, and continuing her design work for industry. She described her situation as enviable:

Occasionally you will hear me cackle, and that is when I remember how I thought retirement would be lapped in idleness. But it is a happy cackle. Everything I do is that elusive employment which cannot be characterized as work—not as unpleasant work, that is—it is activity, it is hobby, it is obsession, it is What I Do. It is enormous fun, and if I weren't doing it I'd be enjoying doing something else—I'm rich beyond the dreams of idleness.¹⁰⁸

Elizabeth clearly felt herself to be 'retired' along with Arnold, despite her pursuit of growing business and professional opportunities. Elizabeth's feelings of accomplishment were not tied to her economic success. Though she was certainly pleased to be able to

¹⁰⁷ Zimmermann, "Digressions" 2.

¹⁰⁸ Elizabeth Zimmermann, "the Lost Document: Monday August 23rd" (unpublished manuscript), 313. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

provide financially for substantial treats for her family, including “over half a dozen student trips to Europe during the high school years”, Elizabeth was adamant about not needing to work to support the family.¹⁰⁹ Arnold was the financial support of the family and his retirement was frequently mentioned as mutual, that is, as their retirement. Elizabeth was not financially ambitious yet she did seek recognition of her abilities, her designs and her philosophy of knitting.

Her deep sense of satisfaction with these non-financial rewards is outlined quite strongly in a 1971 essay, as part of her first draft of her second book, *Knitter's Almanac*, on “the subject of Giving Talks, a form of activity of which I have small but comparatively successful experience” as part of her work in presenting her knitting philosophy and her yarns to women's groups.¹¹⁰ By this time, Elizabeth has had two television series playing on cable television across the country and has just released her first book, *Knitting Without Tears*, through Charles Scribner's Sons Publishing. Elizabeth presented her ideas about knitting to a very wide variety of groups throughout her life but in this essay she described a knitting talk as a minor element in a larger, day long, non-craft specific program. As she sold yarns through these presentations, she felt herself (at least in 1971) unwilling to accept a speaking fee when yarn sales were inevitable. She eschewed any effort at a “professional job of speech-writing, elocution, and delivery” as such expectations would be too high and would “ruin” her enjoyment.¹¹¹ Elizabeth adhered to several principles in her presentations: to tell no jokes, to be honest when she

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., “Jan 28th, Thursday”, 33.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., “Wednesday August 11th,” 299-301.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

did not know something, and to never declare something absolutely right or wrong. For Elizabeth, decisions of all kinds were up to the individual:

For me, of course, this is easy, and I don't have to dissemble. I really do not consider anything in knitting wither (sic) right or wrong. Some things I prefer to other, but this is entirely subjective, and I neither expect nor desire other knitters to agree with me. Thank god we are different, one from another, Thank god we grow, and change our minds and our opinions. What would happen to Presidential Elections if we didn't? Sometimes I slip the first stitch; sometimes I knit it, sometimes I purl it; it all depends on the effect I want. (But I must admit to slipping it most of the time.)¹¹²

This principle of knitter's choice was essential to Elizabeth's philosophy of knitting as craftsmanship with decision making resting with the knitter. Her leap from concerns over whether or not to slip the first stitch of the row to presidential elections indicates her profound sense that individuals were responsible for their decisions in all areas. For Elizabeth, knitting was life.

Having been careful not to run overtime, Elizabeth was winding down her talk:

The afternoon has worn on; it's time to put on the potatoes,...the ladies start thinning out, and I thin out myself,...feeling, --let's face it—more than a little inflated. A modicum of adulation is the healthiest thing in the world for the average housewife, and I've enjoyed myself to the hilt. By the time I've reached my own driveway, I am awash with well-being and crammed with good resolutions, from which the family—by and large—will benefit, especially if they have the gumption to let me deflate slowly through the evening.¹¹³

Elizabeth's intense satisfaction in her work in educating American knitters and their recognition of that work was evident. Her acceptance of "a modicum of adulation",

¹¹² Ibid., 300.

¹¹³ Ibid.

shared out to her family, was her reward. This deep professional and creative satisfaction, rather than a primarily financial one, does illuminate Elizabeth's motivations for her work. By seeking professional and creative recognition from her peers, and by deprioritizing financial incentives, Elizabeth was clearly able to view herself as a traditional wife and mother, reliant financially on her primary breadwinning husband, while allowing her to pursue her 'modicum of adulation' from the creative and professional work. Yet Elizabeth defined her peers not only as American knitters in general, but as craftsmen, and it was this professional craftsmen recognition that would be somewhat more difficult for Elizabeth to achieve in Wisconsin.

An early social and professional recognition of sorts came through the Walrus Club of Milwaukee. Elizabeth and Arnold were "delighted" to find the Walrus Club of Milwaukee and to recognize it as "a touch of New Hope... in Milwaukee".¹¹⁴ Primarily a social club for writers, musicians, and artists, and those individuals interested in the arts, and founded in 1919, the club's membership was mandated to be 60% professional writers, musicians and artists, and 40% art lovers and patrons.¹¹⁵ The club met weekly and held several annual large gatherings, including a New Year's eve party and the regular Pre-Lenten costume ball. It was this costume ball that seems to have been of most intense interest to the Zimmermann family as Elizabeth's personal collection of flyers and invitations extended from 1951 to 1963. Both Arnold and Elizabeth took some roles in supporting the organization over time with Arnold serving as the chair of the 1959 Ball and various newspaper clippings showing Elizabeth hard at work in constructing

¹¹⁴ Meg Swansen, interviewed by author, July 11, 2012. Schoolhouse Press, Pittsville, WI.

¹¹⁵ Filomena Phillips, "Madame Chairman: Walrus Club to Forego Ball for Eighth Time since '22" *Milwaukee Sentinel* (Milwaukee WI). n.d. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

backdrops and props for several of the balls. Their delight in the costume balls, as reminders of their early days in Munich attending the annual Fasching celebrations, was expressed in Elizabeth's elaborate original costumes for the two of them. As a painter and accomplished seamstress, Elizabeth's creations were often featured in newspaper coverage of the event.

Elizabeth's archives regarding the Walrus Club end with the 1963 "Flight of Fantasy" Ball and this is roughly similar to Meg's memories of her parent's involvement with the club lasting over a period of 10 years or so. With the purchase of the school house in 1958, major renovation work done by the family over the next several years and the part-time move to the schoolhouse in 1970, their social activities in Milwaukee may have been becoming limited. Yet the Walrus Club may have been important for Elizabeth as an initial networking opportunity for entrance to the artistic social community in Milwaukee. It is probable that Elizabeth learned of the Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen and met the local television daytime host Beulah Donahue at Walrus Club events, expanding Elizabeth's professional connections well beyond her immediate social circle. Yet membership here was not definitively recognition of professional status. Elizabeth would need to seek elsewhere for recognition of her professional status as a studio craft artisan.

2.2 Becoming a Studio Crafts Professional: Appropriate Materials, Exhibitions and Professional Crafts Recognition

The primary goals of a working artisan are to procure materials and tools for the work, to find a market for produced items, and to become known professionally for high

quality work. Elizabeth's work in each of these areas was well documented. Elizabeth accessed a fairly wide variety of sales venues open to her as a knitter in the Midwest, including local shop sales, the Milwaukee Woman's Exchange Handcraft Department, and the New York City Woman's Exchange. Her dissatisfaction with the standard consumer offerings of the local yarn shops led her to seek out higher quality wool yarns from a variety of domestic and international sources, which she used in her design work and in her garment sales. She established a further income stream for her studio by way of yarn sales by mail order to other knitters. Her pursuit of professional recognition as a craftsperson involved her pursuit of exhibition opportunities for her work and of professional membership in the Wisconsin Designer Craftsman, a state level professional association of artists and craftsman that organized both exhibition and sales opportunities across the state of Wisconsin.

The earliest document regarding the sales of garments discovered in the collection at Schoolhouse Press is a membership card for the Women's Exchange Handcraft Department of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, with the handwritten note "#206 Mrs. A. Zimmermann, consignor fee good for one year from date 12-1-53".¹¹⁶ Invoices recording Elizabeth's placement of garments, largely caps and "Norwegian" or ski bonnets illustrate a commercial relationship that continued through 1958 and included a set of 5 gingerbread houses sold through the Industrial Exchange in 1954. While the price Elizabeth received for the gingerbread houses was not listed on the invoices, she regularly sold her caps and bonnets for \$6 less a 25% fee to the Industrial Exchange. She

¹¹⁶ Membership Card #206, issued by Women's Industrial Exchange, January 1, 1953, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

sold her children and adult garments through more local vendors, including Louise Goodell, Inc. in Whitefish Bay, WI, and the Clothes Horse in Milwaukee (later Wauwatosa, Wisconsin).¹¹⁷

Elizabeth's relationship with Miss D. S. Case of the Children's Department of the New York Women's Exchange in New York City was rather more problematic. Archival records show a relationship from 1956-1959 troubled by poor record keeping with Elizabeth repeatedly querying the Exchange for clarification over special orders and asking after unpaid shipments. Elizabeth's attempts to be true to her own principles of original craftsmanship may have caused some of the difficulties. A July 10, 1956, draft letter to the Exchange by Elizabeth makes clear that Elizabeth prided herself on each unique color design:

Thank you for your order and for your note. I have the grey sweater already on the needles, but shall be unable to reproduce the exact pattern unless I have the smaller sweater to copy. You see it is a point of pride with me never to make two alike, so I keep no records of the patterns or even of the colour combinations....If she wants them copied exactly, the only this would (sic) be to send the models back to me for this purpose (sic). In case this is not practicable, I enclose samples of the yarns I have been using this year, so that you can snip off pieces of the colors the customer wishes.

I fear this is all rather complicated, but the only alternative is to make only a few stereotyped designs, which I think rather detracts from the charm of the whole deal.¹¹⁸

This must have been a fairly complicated negotiation indeed across the miles between Milwaukee and New York and including the three principals of knitter/designer, customer and Exchange liaison. A series of letters between January 29, 1958 and

¹¹⁷ Elizabeth Zimmermann to Mary Mason of Louise Goodell, Inc., April 10, 1956 and The Clothes Horse collection of invoices and correspondence, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

¹¹⁸ Elizabeth Zimmermann to Miss D. S. Case, July 10, 1956, Schoolhouse Press Archive, Pittsville, WI.

November 4, 1959 repeatedly querying over lost and unpaid-for sweaters attest to the difficulties of this three way relationship. The missing sweaters may have amounted to as much as \$210, considerable sums for a small business in 1958.¹¹⁹

Whatever the difficulties in recordkeeping, Elizabeth's garment sales had to have corresponding materials purchases. While it is unclear exactly what materials Elizabeth was using in these earliest garment sales, the archives show that by the mid-fifties, Elizabeth was generating strong relationships with American, Scottish and Canadian wool producers whose products she felt were much superior to the hand knitting yarns available through American manufacturers. Her dissatisfaction with her choices in the consumer yarn market is tied both the rise in the marketing of synthetic hand knitting yarns in the early 1950s, and to the subsequent scarcity of good wool yarns in the shops. While it certainly behooved her to find wholesale sources for her studio work, it is also due to her sense that craftsmen took their choices around materials very seriously. Elizabeth wrote extensively on her preferences for wool in her publications but two further examples of the tension around materials for the knitter are given in the 1971 unpublished document. While these are later documents, their instances, coupled with the geographical extent of Elizabeth's search for high quality materials and the difficulties of small scale importation across international boundaries, show her frustration over the yarn industry's designation of the knitter as a passive consumer, and show her resolution as a craftsman to control her own process of making.

¹¹⁹ New York Women's Exchange collection, Schoolhouse Press Archive, Pittsville, WI.

In the first instance, Elizabeth appeals directly to her fellow knitters in a manifesto around the right of craftsmen to choice:

Knitters of the world, unite! Let us not permit the delightful sheep to disappear from the world without a struggle. There is nothing like wool for warmth, comfort, and good looks, and no matter what the chemist and scientist, and, loudest of all, the merchant, tell us. Let us fight for wool; let us demand it in the store, and go away with our purses unopened if there is none. We are free craftsmen in a free country, and we must insist on the right to choose our own material.¹²⁰

Her outright claim to the rights of craftsmen to their materials of choice emphasized her own claim to that identity and her desire to introduce that identity to American knitters.

In the later entry, Elizabeth describes the paucity of choice available to the yarn consumer. In a search for a baby wool-nylon blend suitable for baby legging for her grandson Cully, Elizabeth sought across two regional cities before turning to Milwaukee's "best specialty yarn shop" and "best department store" with little success.¹²¹ She was informed at the counter that:

Half-and-half is discontinued, synthetics are the good (?) word, yes, we have some all-wool in knitting worsted, but nothing else. I drew breath to scream and jump up and down but let it out with a hiss. After all, the sales girl couldn't help it. When I said she might mention wool to the salesman she regarded me almost with pity; apparently the customer's opinion no longer passes through the salesgirl through the salesman through his boss to Those on High, who are stuffing synthetics down our unwilling gullets.... Well we may be sheep, our heels nipped by the sheep dogs of the advertisers and merchandisers (sic), but at least we can bleat. I bleated at the sales girl—only very gently, but a definite bleat,--and wrung from her the comment that it was a shame, but---catchword of our times, 'wodgergonnado?' I'm going to do plenny... I shall knit myself a woolly soapbox, and holler from it at the drop of a watchcap. (sic)¹²²

¹²⁰ Elizabeth Zimmermann, "Lost Document: January 21st, Thursday". (unpublished manuscript, 1971), 25. Schoolhouse Press Archive, Pittsville, WI

¹²¹ Ibid., "Lost Document: Wednesday, June 23rd". 229.

¹²² Ibid., 229-230.

Elizabeth's frustration over the lack of choice in materials across two regional cities and the best yarn sources in the state capital of a northern state infamous for cold and snowy winters was acute. But again, she signaled to American knitters that resistance was possible and that 'soapboxes' were an option for those with determination.

Seen as a response to these conditions of scarcity in materials, the passivity of the consumer identity, and the resolution of craftsmen's choices, the extent of Elizabeth's hunt for good wool yarns should not be surprising. In 1954, Elizabeth found the wool yarns of the Cambridge Woolen Mills very much to her taste and she began a commercial relationship with the mill that would last until its closing upon the death of the owner Ed Bjorkland in early 1970. This relationship would include their production of her 1964 original yarn design known as Sheepdown, the basis for a number of Elizabeth's best known designs. The Cambridge Woolen Mill correspondence in the archives at Schoolhouse Press shows that Elizabeth was ordering relatively small amounts of natural unbleached wool colors of grey and white in 1954 and being quoted by the Mill for wholesale prices in 1955.¹²³ This yarn gave Elizabeth a heavyweight yet soft knitting worsted yarn in natural wool colors that worked well for outerwear.

Elizabeth's hunt for her preferences in materials was not discouraged by international trade barriers. A single March 21, 1955, letter from James Turfus, 26 Albert Street, Kirkwall, Orkney, indicates an early date for her international reach. By 1956, she was purchasing Shetland yarns in quantities enough for three sweaters at a time from

¹²³ Cambridge Woolen Mill Correspondence 1954-1970 collection, (9 letters plus handwritten notes and invoices), Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

Tulloch of Shetland, Ltd. Lerwick.¹²⁴ A January 22, 1957, letter from Elizabeth to “Messers Tulloch of Shetland” details her endeavor as “a small Mail Order Yarn business” with a “small but steady demand for Shetland Yarns” and she inquired after wholesale discount rates. Her letter of March 13, 1957, takes advantage of their discounts and her order is placed for 100 cuts of yarn, enough for 25 adult sweaters. These Shetland yarns came in a wide variety of bright colors, and were suitable for lighter garments for indoor wear.

A third significant yarn in her early sales list was Canadian. The Red Label wool yarn manufactured by Canadian manufacturer Harold F. Stanfield Ltd. met with her approval and archival evidence shows Elizabeth attempting to connect Stanfield with *McCalls* Magazine over her designs in the fall of 1955, and to query the possibility of her becoming the exclusive retail dealer for Red Label in the United States.¹²⁵ Named by Elizabeth as Fisherman’s Yarn, this strong smooth yarn was useful to Elizabeth in her outerwear designs that required bright colors. These three yarns formed the backbone of Elizabeth’s design work and can be seen in her most iconic designs. The natural coloured unbleached wools from Cambridge were used for the Aran sweaters; the soft colored Shetland yarns were the basis for the seamless yoke sweater; the Fisherman’s yarns made up the colorful Scandinavian styles.

The Cambridge Mills, and the Stansfield Red Label wools also became the basis for the earliest advertisement for Elizabeth’s yarn sales extant in the archives. With

¹²⁴ Tulloch of Shetland, Ltd., Correspondence collection, (letters and invoices). Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

¹²⁵ Harold Stanfield Ltd Correspondence 1955-1960 collection (5 letters), Schoolhouse Press Archive, Pittsville, WI.

having secured materials to her liking, and with garment sales proceeding, Elizabeth widened her income stream to material sales, offering wool yarns to American knitters just as synthetic yarns were entering the hand knitting market.¹²⁶ In a draft handwritten letter to Cambridge Woolen Mills, dated to February 24, probably 1954, Elizabeth explained her idea for yarn sales by mail order:

I was very pleased with your shipment of pretty yarns. I find them handsome, sturdy and especially suited for the sports sweaters and _____ which I design and sell to women's magazines. Now I am thinking of selling natural yarns by mail order and would like to include your products if agreeable to you. Would you be interested in letting me have the rights to sell your yarns by mail for a certain period of time, say about the end of this year? It is at present, of course, impossible to say how much I should need. As far as I know this is a brand new idea for marketing specialty yarns but I imagine the demand might be considerable.¹²⁷

Elizabeth was shifting from merely procuring her own supplies for garment and design production towards the sale of yarns to a private customer list was proceeding. And her 'imagination' of the desire of American knitters for greater choice in their materials is one of her earliest hints regarding her imagined community of American knitters as significantly different from the industry's imagination.

Three early advertisements for Elizabeth's yarns sales by mail trace some of her thinking around building her customer list. Small block advertisements inserted into the March 15, 1955, *Skiing Magazine*, and the 1956 *New Hope Gazette* emphasize the international aspects in both use of the Germanic "Unentoeelte Naturschafwolle" terminology for unscoured, unbleached natural wool and her emphasis on the national

¹²⁶ The entrance of synthetic yarns into the hand knitting market was traced by the researcher by means of the Sears Roebuck Company Mail Order Catalogs(1950-1965).

¹²⁷ Elizabeth Zimmermann to Cambridge Woolen Mills, draft handwritten letter dated Feb 24, no year. Schoolhouse Press Archive, Pittsville, WI.

origins of the wool.¹²⁸ Yet by the September, 1963, advertisement in *Field and Stream*, Elizabeth has dropped the internationalism in favor of a distinctly unsentimental nostalgia:

Hand-knitted Hunting Socks, like Grandma Used to Make... heavy unbleached natural Sheepswool; nylon in toes and heels; 12 high. State size. \$7.50 per pair. **What? \$7.50?!** All right then, make them yourself. Send just **\$1.60** for sufficient yarn and full instructions. Box 555, Milwaukee 11, Wis. Sorry, no CODs, but money back if not completely satisfied.¹²⁹

Elizabeth might be willing to traffic in the grandmotherly image of knitting but her grandmother was going to stand up for the value of her labor!

Elizabeth's resistance to the devaluation of her labor (even if humorously) was fundamentally connected to her resistance to the consumer offerings of the American yarn manufacturers. Elizabeth was a professional craftsperson and demanded respect for her products and had respect for her materials. As craftsmanship, rather than as simply middle class 'domestic craft', Elizabeth was taking control of her materials, and demanding respect for her labor, in a skilled practice highly based in materials, rather than simply choosing among standard consumer offerings.

While Elizabeth made very good use of the standard categories of yarn such as knitting worsted, fingering and sport, she also ventured outside of those standard boundaries. Interested in innovations and improvements in her practices of making, Elizabeth introduced new yarn types to her knitters. A chance discovery of Icelandic yarns by Meg Zimmermann in the early sixties led to Elizabeth's importation of the somewhat

¹²⁸ *Skiing Magazine* Correspondence collection, March 1-7 1955 and "For the Ladies" *New Hope Gazette*, Classified Section, October 25, 1956. Schoolhouse Press Archive, Pittsville, WI.

¹²⁹ Advertisement, *Field and Stream*, Sept 1963 (clipping). Schoolhouse Press Archive, Pittsville, WI.

fragile, unspun, very long fiber, and single ply yarn made from Icelandic sheep. Announced in her Fall 1964 *Newsletter*, Elizabeth identified the yarn as “neither for beginners, nor should it be mixed with young children or puppies; it is a rewarding challenge for the experienced knitter, yielding a hairy, strong but silky fabric---quite beguiling.”¹³⁰ This unusual and extraordinarily adaptable yarn was used for multiple projects from lace work to outerwear.

Elizabeth’s only foray into yarn design, a collaboration with Cambridge Mills, was announced in the Fall 1960 *Newsletter* to her wool customers as her new Sheepsdawn yarn, an extra bulky but light and lofty wool yarn knitting at 2.5 or 3 stitches per inch and designed to “satisfy demand for a yarn to knit Cowichan Indian Sweaters in a lighter, smoother, less pungent form.”¹³¹ Sheepsdawn yarn became one of Elizabeth’s trademark yarns and was custom made for her, first by Cambridge Woolen Mills, and then later by Bartlett Yarns of Maine. Its importance to Elizabeth is made clear in a set of correspondence with Bartlett Yarns of Maine in 1973.

In a draft letter dated January 5, 1973, Elizabeth writes to Mr. Titcomb in protest over Bartlett’s use of the name in their marketing.

The name ‘SHEEPSDOWN’ is our own original, and I would appreciate it very much if you ~~did not~~ use it. If you are at a loss for a substitute name, our name-inventor has come up with ‘MAINEFLEECE’, of which we will make you a present. I think it is more descriptive and euphonious, as well as correct! (It has long since been pointed out to us that it is birds that have down, no (sic) sheep.) ~~However,~~ Since we have used the name for about fifteen years, ~~we have decided to stick with it.~~ It is our hallmark. As such

¹³⁰ Elizabeth Zimmermann, “Newsletter and Leaflet #13, Fall 1964”. Reprinted in *The Opinionated Knitter: Elizabeth Zimmermann Newsletters, 1958-1968*. (Pittsville WI: Schoolhouse Press, 2005). 73.

¹³¹ Elizabeth Zimmermann, “Newsletter and Leaflet #5, Fall 1960” reprinted in *The Opinionated Knitter: Elizabeth Zimmermann Newsletters, 1958-1968*. (Pittsville WI: Schoolhouse Press, 2005). 20.

it is definitely a proprietary item in our business. Will you please let me know your views on the above?

Titcomb's quick response, dated January 9, 1973, apologized to Elizabeth and recognized her use of the name as a "trade name", promising to "shy away" from using it as soon as already printed materials using the name Sheepdown were depleted.¹³²

Elizabeth's respect for her materials, and her labor, speaks to one of the markers of professional craftsmanship but it is not the only marker. Her early studio work shows the movement of carefully considered materials in and finished pieces out but Elizabeth wanted professional recognition by her peers as well, and to have her work recognized as on par with other professional studio crafts such as jewelry, glass, ceramics/pottery, wood, and metal craft. But this was a more difficult struggle and touched on the cultural value of craft and the problematic place of knitting therein. Elizabeth's efforts to have her work accepted for exhibition were relatively simple when couched as domestic production in such a venue as the Home Economics divisions of the Wisconsin State Fair but was troubled by resistance among professional crafts people such as the Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen's organization.

The archives show her exhibition with both the Wisconsin State Fair Festival of the Arts and the Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen organization but neither of these avenues was problem-free. Elizabeth's multiyear campaign for acceptance by the Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen overlapped a period in which the WDC was re-shaping their central purpose and their various levels of membership. This period of shifting identities and increasing professionalism in craft work must have made Elizabeth's application problematic for the

¹³² Bartlett Yarns, Inc. Correspondence, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

WDC Council though there is no record specific to Elizabeth in the minutes of their discussions. Her work for the State Fair Festival of the Arts may have had an easier time due to the long history of exhibition for domestic work in the agricultural community but her work was often mislabeled by the State Fair Arts and Crafts division as weaving.

The Wisconsin State Fair, like all state agricultural fairs, has a long history of domestic textile exhibition but in 1950 some change in the exhibition was indicated by the inauguration of a new title for at least part of the exhibition, the Wisconsin State Fair “Festival of the Arts”.¹³³ Elizabeth’s earliest exhibition for which we have evidence is the 1955 Wisconsin State Fair, in which Elizabeth won (and kept) three ribbons in the Home Economics Textiles division. The backs of these ribbons show Elizabeth’s own handwritten record of her awards with the single blue “1st Premium” being awarded for her “Blue grey a white Tam”, and the two red ribbons “2nd Premium” awarded for a “Man’s Ski Sweater. Cream a Oatmeal with Black” and a “Red Blue a White Ski-Bonnet”.¹³⁴ It is possible that the man’s ski sweater is one of the original Norwegian Ski sweaters, Elizabeth’s first credited design sale, published in January 1955 *Woman’s Day*.

The next record of her exhibition at the 1959 State Fair provides us with slightly more information. Elizabeth submitted five items and four were accepted for exhibition into the Wisconsin State Fair Festival of the Arts. Her own annotations to the official letter note that the Chain Mail and the Norway Pine sweaters, a sweater named “A.Z. Work Sweater” and a “Child’s Shetland, Green yoke” were accepted while a fifth

¹³³ An examination of the history of textile exhibition at the WI State Fair would be illuminating in further examining the edge between domestic excellence and artisan exhibition.

¹³⁴ Wisconsin State Fair Ribbons (1955), Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

unnamed sweater was rejected.¹³⁵ Unfortunately these items were listed as accepted “4 Weaving” and not accepted as knitting.¹³⁶ Rather more information is provided in the following year of 1960. A *Milwaukee Sentinel* reporter, Donald Key, lists the juror as David Campbell, “a New York Architect” and claims well over a thousand items were submitted for jurying. While Elizabeth is not mentioned in this article, Campbell was quoted as noting the ceramics and textiles as “particularly excellent.”¹³⁷ Elizabeth did not annotate the official State Fair notice of acceptance and rejection with her own titles in this instance but the official statement, dated August 1960, shows “3 items” as accepted, and 2, a “Gn & bl wool” and a “Woman’s Yoke wool, Blue” as rejected.¹³⁸

Elizabeth’s final and fullest record of her exhibition with the Wisconsin State Fair Festival of the Arts occurred in 1961. Her collection of materials included parts of the official exhibition catalog, including the juror statement and Elizabeth’s name included in the professional division and listed as receiving one of four non-monetary “Certificate of Merit” awards. The catalog shows at least sixty-nine exhibitors and 225 items accepted into the professional division.¹³⁹ The official WI State Fair notice of acceptance and rejection, dated August 1961, lists her items as “Wool Blanket”, “Red hooded sweater”, “Grey hooded sweater”, “cream sweater,” “Grey Sweater”, “cream & black sweater” and

¹³⁵ Wisconsin State Fair Festival of the Arts August 1959 (letter), Elizabeth’s Clipping Binder, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

¹³⁶ The material for the 1959 WI State Fair exhibit consists of a small collection of clippings with the signature lost on the notification of acceptance letter, and only Elizabeth’s name and “4 Weaving” to indicate her four items accepted as weaving.

¹³⁷ Donald Key, “Experts Start Judging the Fairs Arts, Crafts” *Milwaukee Journal*, August 5, 1960.

¹³⁸ James A. Schwalbach, Supt. Of Arts and Crafts, to Elizabeth Zimmermann, August 1960. Elizabeth’s Clipping Binder, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

¹³⁹ Zimmerman’s page ending position in an alphabetical listing of exhibitors does not preclude further exhibitors but it is highly unlikely that it would more than 1 or 2 to the list.

finally a “Yellow Aran sweater”.¹⁴⁰ Elizabeth’s own handwritten notes on both the letter of acceptance and the letter notifying her of the award imply that the wool blanket, the grey sweater and the yellow Aran were the award winners.

The 1961 State Fair Festival of the Arts juror’s statement, kept by Elizabeth in her papers, is of particular interest. Roy Ginstrom, the juror of Riverside, Illinois, remarks on the idiosyncratic nature of the Fair’s method of allowing exhibitors to self-select as professional or amateur and Ginstrom writes at some length on what he regards as the differences between the two.

By declaring himself a ‘professional’ I do feel a craftsman selects for himself a sterner discipline, declares a willingness to be judged within more restricted limits. I assume that such craftsmen consider themselves to have achieved a high level of skill in the handling of their medium. ...consider themselves capable of making firm and positive statements in that medium, and that deviations from the more traditional forms of expression are the result of a disciplined talent and a searching sensitive intellect working toward an extension of the boundaries within which serious craftsmen have chosen to work in that medium. Within the professional category I looked for technical competence as a basic requirement....The trivial I felt had no place in a ‘professional’ show. Novelty for its own sake was suspected, as was ineptness under the guise of ‘self-expression’. While there are a number of experimental pieces in the show, I feel them to be highly competent, valid and positive statements which adhere to disciplines as strict as those of their more traditional counterparts. The traditional pieces are excellent examples of technical proficiency coupled with great deal of sensitivity and taste...every bit as exciting and as creative as the more adventurous entries.¹⁴¹

While it is certainly unclear whether or not Ginstrom considered Elizabeth’s knit garments to be either traditional or experimental and a case could be made for either

¹⁴⁰ James A. Schinneller, Supt. of Arts and Crafts, to Zimmermann, August 1961. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI

¹⁴¹ “11th Wisconsin State Fair Craftsmen’s Fair” Wisconsin State Fair Festival of the Arts 1961 (incomplete brochure). Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

position, his acceptance of her seven pieces, the largest number of pieces from a single textile exhibitor, indicates his appreciation of her work as both technically excellent and aesthetically pleasing and well worthy of exhibition as professional craft. This makes it all the more disappointing that her work was again mislabeled as “weaving” in the exhibit catalog. Further research into the contemporary structures of the State Fair home economics textile exhibition and Festival of the Arts could shed light on the lack of either a more specific set of categories that would include ‘knitting’ or a larger more inclusive category that would rightly include a broad range of genre such as ‘textiles’.

Ginstrom’s concerns of the differentiation between professional and amateur status for craftsmen were to be echoed in the Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen’s renegotiations around membership in this same period. While the State Fair tradition of celebration in the traditional areas of agriculture and domesticity allowed for a relatively simple avenue of exhibition for Elizabeth, without the need for the definition of membership or exhibition eligibility beyond state residency, the Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen was a wholly different tradition and culture. Coming out of the late 19th and early 20th century revival of the arts and crafts movement in the United States, the WDC was founded in 1916 and focused not on the crafts of domesticity, but rather on the traditional professional studio crafts that included various combinations of materials, techniques, and end products known as glass, jewelry, ceramic, metals, textiles, and wood. Typically handweaving was the only representative of cloth-making practices, while the surface-design techniques such as batik and screen printing filled out the ‘textile’ category. The WDC required a defined membership status but also fostered a wider range of professional exhibition and sales opportunities in these years with three

annual exhibits, the Annual Exhibit, the Christmas Fair and the Traveling Show. The WDC was very much concerned with the identity and qualifications of craftsmen in the European tradition, not in women's domestic arts.

This traditional understanding of studio arts was to be challenged by the times, and by Elizabeth, and several revisions to the WDC Constitution in the period between 195/1956 and 1966 show changes in the various levels of membership. Like the Walrus Club, the WDC did accept individuals into membership who were not themselves actively producing craftspeople but the Walrus club was a much more purely social club while the WDC was a professional organization whose goal was to further the professional development and achievement of its members through exhibition and through connections with other crafts organizations. An examination of 6 documents between 1940 and 1966 shows a number of shifts to their membership categories that illustrate the WDC wrestling with these issues for their members as they work towards greater professionalism among their actively productive membership.

The membership categories for the WDC reflect its realization that the state of professional craftsperson was a fairly fluid one. The professional craftsperson was, and remains to this day, unlikely to be earning their sole living from the sale of studio work. Most crafts persons would have had family support, or some full or part time work with a claim on their time and productivity level. The WDC managed this situation through a fluid multi-tiered membership that attempted to account for changing levels of studio productivity. The June, 1956, Constitution listed an entry level tier of "Associate Member" for "any craftsperson or interested person" while an "Active member" category

recognized a record of exhibition by the member.¹⁴² These two categories allowed for a simple division between those individuals interested in studio crafts, and those working in the media and with an exhibition record.

Yet, by the revision of February, 1960, four years later, the membership process, and responsibilities have become much more specific, more concerned with active production of work and with the correct adjudication of specific genres and techniques for membership, rather than for simple exhibition. The new revision also instigated a process by which a reduction in productivity by an Active Member would be recognized by a reduction in membership level. By 1960, the entry level Associate membership no longer allowed the amorphous “interested person” but was limited to active craftsman with an adjudication process for five pieces completed in the last two years.¹⁴³ This entry level, seemingly for the first time, set a bar for quality of current work by the membership, and allowed for a correspondingly higher standard at the next level. The Active member of 1960 had to comply with stronger requirements for exhibition at the major WDC events. Furthermore, failure to exhibit could allow an Active member to lapse into the lower Associate level.¹⁴⁴ This increased emphasis on the quality of the work, the active production schedule by the craftsman, and the continuing participation in regular exhibitions illustrated a shift towards increased professionalism among the Craftsmen organization, one mirroring the growing professionalism nationwide with the

¹⁴² WDC Constitution November 1951 Revision, and June 1956 Revision, Wisconsin Designer Crafts Council records 1916-2009. Box 1, Series 1 (Administrative History 1928-2009) Folder 9. Milwaukee Art Museum Library and Archives, Milwaukee, WI.

¹⁴³ WDC Constitution, February 1960 Revision, Wisconsin Designer Crafts Council records, 1916-2009. Box 1, Series 1 (Administrative History 1928-2009), Folder 8. Milwaukee Art Museum Library and Archives, Milwaukee, WI.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

growth of the national American Craft Council and its 1960 outreach effort, with the inauguration of six regional conferences across the country.¹⁴⁵

The 1965 Constitution continued this membership revision with a new set of categories. The previous working craftsman categories of Associate and Active were replaced by Associate, Professional, and Accredited categories, effectively adding a new layer of professional achievement for members. In this new system, the new Professional status roughly equaled the previous “Active Member” with a required exhibition “in a minimum of two major professional state or national craft exhibitions” and the submission of “five original craft works” for adjudication.¹⁴⁶ Like the 1960 provision allowing for a reduction in membership, the 1965 Professional status also allowed for a return to Associate status upon advisement by the Council if the member failed to meet the requirements of participation. This new status of Professional delineated certain privileges but also conferred “eligibility for application to Accredited membership.”¹⁴⁷ This Accredited membership level signified an entirely new level which recognized national status in the crafts by requiring dual memberships. An Accredited member was required to be “a member of both the American Craftsmen’s Council and the Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen who has passed the professional membership requirements in the WDC and the ACC state accredited craftsman

¹⁴⁵ “Our History” American Craft Council website, January 23, 2012, accessed August 4, 2014. <http://craftcouncil.org/history>.

¹⁴⁶ WDC Constitution, Feb 1965 Revision, Wisconsin Designer Craft Council records, 1916-2009. Series 1 Box 1, Folder 7, Milwaukee Art Museum Library and Archives.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

membership requirements.”¹⁴⁸ These changes institutionalized the recognition of the ACC as a higher level of professionalism, with significant benefits to the individual WDC members in the way of high quality exhibition opportunities.

While the available archives of the WDC in this period show no mention of the individual application of Elizabeth Zimmermann, it is likely that the organization’s trajectory of increasing professionalism would have been experienced as in conflict with Elizabeth’s attempts to have knitting recognized as professional craft work. Prior to Elizabeth herself, very little knitting would have been seen as professional studio craft, rather than as a strongly gendered domestic handcraft. As shown in the previous chapter, all publications were written to an audience of domestic women interested in either fashion or economic utility. Knitting, unlike weaving and embroidery, had not played any significant part in either the British Arts or Crafts Movement nor of the later German crafts revival of the Bauhaus. Knitting as a craft had been situated purely in the domestic realm. This environment makes it all the more surprising that Elizabeth did achieve membership as a knitter, and no other knitter seems to have achieved that status during Elizabeth’s membership up to 1971.

Elizabeth’s campaign for acceptance as an exhibiting member of the WDC was finally successful with the 1958 35th Annual Exhibit ¹⁴⁹ and continued regularly through

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ The information regarding the resistance of the WDC to exhibit Elizabeth’s knitting is based in Meg Swansen’s recall of her mother’s frustration over the issue for 2-3 years in the mid-1950s. No record of the specific issue of Elizabeth’s membership application is recorded in either the WDC records at the Milwaukee Art Museum, or in the WDC records on microfilm at the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian, Washington, DC.

1971. Her initial entry of a single sweater to the exhibit (textiles juried by Henry C. Kluck of Riverside, Illinois) excited a full paragraph in the *Milwaukee Sentinel* review:

A blow for knitting as an aesthetic art was struck by Elizabeth Zimmermann who has an extremely handsome bulky, high-necked sweater in a Scandinavianish (sic) pattern of black on grey in the show. It's priced at \$150 but anyone buying it could pass it on decades hence as an heirloom.¹⁵⁰

The WDC held its Annual Exhibit for 6 weeks in 1958 with Elizabeth Zimmermann's entry, "Sweater, wool, \$150.00" incorrectly listed in the exhibition catalog under "Weaving" despite the presence of a more general and correct category of "Textiles".¹⁵¹ Despite Elizabeth's success in finally achieving exhibition, the Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen was still somewhat confused by her presence as a knitter.

After 1958, Elizabeth exhibited fairly regularly with the Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen prestigious Annual Exhibit, and in the Traveling Exhibit. The archival record of the Annual Exhibit Catalogs is fairly complete and documents Elizabeth's exhibitions in 1958, 1960, 1963-1967, and finally 1969-1971. The incomplete membership records that exist, and the Annual Exhibit Catalog record, record her membership as from 1958-1974. Listed in 1960 as a full Active Member, Elizabeth's status moved in 1965 to Professional level, and finally, in the April 1971 WDC Newsletter, Elizabeth was noted on the highest level as an Accredited Member.¹⁵² Her own feelings about her exhibition

¹⁵⁰ Margaret Fish, "Unusual Gifts Available in Two Exhibits of Craft" *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 16, 1958. (Milwaukee Art Museum Archives, Box 4, Series 11, Folder 30.)

¹⁵¹ WDCC Exhibition Catalogs, 1922-2003 collection. Series 5, Box 1, Folder 56, Wisconsin Design Craft Council records, 1916-2009, Milwaukee Art Museum Library and Archives, Milwaukee, WI.

¹⁵² The incomplete member records archived for this period make it difficult to know exactly when Elizabeth shifted membership levels.

were made known in her “*Newsletter #2 Winter 1959-60*” addressed to her wool customers:

Let your mind run on the possibilities of knitting as a genuine craft. I have had sweaters in two craft exhibits recently, & it feels wonderful. So if you have done any designing of your own, try entering it in a show. I feel very strongly about the integrity of knitting, and shall expatiate on this at another time.¹⁵³

Elizabeth’s expatiations on the ‘integrity of knitting’ and its possibilities as ‘a genuine craft’ were only beginning but it is clear that her satisfaction around the recognition by the WDC of her professional craft status was profound.

Elizabeth’s exhibit record over this period is informative. Regularly submitting several sweaters and caps, she usually exhibited at least two items and these were often the garments knit as designs sold to magazines and industry publications. In 1960, Elizabeth won the “Dr. Owen Otto Award for Knitting”¹⁵⁴ with its \$25.00 prize for her three sweaters (of five submitted): a “Norse Sweater, cream with black and oatmeal”, a “Heavy Sweater, Cream and Dark Oatmeal” and a “Hooded sweater, Cream and Dark Oatmeal”.¹⁵⁵ This 1960 exhibit catalog listed Elizabeth’s three sweaters in their own category of “Knitting” with Elizabeth as the only exhibitor.¹⁵⁶ By 1964 the Craftsmen’s catalog began to list exhibitors alphabetically with technique or genre noted under the artists’ names. Elizabeth also had three items in the WDC Travelling Exhibit in 1960,

¹⁵³“Elizabeth Zimmermann *Newsletter #2*, Winter 1959-60” Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

¹⁵⁴ Milwaukee Art Center check stub (n.d.) Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

¹⁵⁵ Entry Blank 40th Annual Exhibition of Wisconsin Crafts, “Elizabeth Zimmermann”, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI,

¹⁵⁶ 1960 WDC Annual Exhibition Catalog (brochure). Box 1, Series 5 (WDC Exhibition Catalogs, 1922-2003) Folder 54. Milwaukee Art Museum Library and Archives. Milwaukee, WI.

including her notable sweater design “More than Oriental Splendor”.¹⁵⁷ This particular design was sold to *Woman’s Day* in the same year and published in their November 1960 issue.

The jurors of this period were notable craft figures: Paul J. Smith (1963), Director of the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, NYC; Hedy Backlin (1964), Curator of Decorative Arts, Cooper Union Museum, NYC; Harold J. Brennan (1965), Dean of the College of Fine and Applied Arts, Rochester Institute of Technology. Elizabeth was awarded an Honorable Mention by Brennan in the 1965 show, an extraordinarily large show for the WDC, for a sweater knit in unspun Icelandic wool.¹⁵⁸ Later jurors included Edwin Scheier (1967) and Nell Znamierowski (textiles, 1970).

Typically Elizabeth exhibited garments of sweaters and caps but in 1969, she submitted her first and only hanging. She wrote at some length about the context of this unusual piece in her 1971 unpublished manuscript remarking that hangings as examples of textile crafts were popular as both exhibits and in purchases:

You know that I am fighting to place knitting among the bona fide crafts, such as weaving, potting, metalwork et al. In this process I sometimes manage to insinuate a knitted piece into a craft show, and so find myself frequenting craft shows. Soon it became clear to me that frequently exhibits were classified as ‘hangings’....craft show were richly provided with hangings, and the word got to me. I will make a hanging in its archaic sense, I said to myself, and I knitted Amos. Why Amos? From the moment his first foot was finished it looked like Amos and Amos he remained.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ “Fabric in the 1960 Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen Traveling Exhibit”, Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen collection, Smithsonian Archives of American Art, reel 597.

¹⁵⁸ “Court of Honor Certificate for 45th Annual WDC Exhibit” and “Art Center to Open Largest Show of State” undated, uncited newspaper clipping, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

¹⁵⁹ Elizabeth Zimmermann, “Lost Document: Thursday, May 20”, (unpublished manuscript). 177-8. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

Amos was a knitted doll, begun from the tip of the toes and knit up the legs. Elizabeth detailed directions for knit-on clothing, finger tips and facial features in her manuscript before finishing Amos completely.

...then I knitted a rope and hanged him by it. He looked melancholy indeed, and the annual craft show accepted him. As so often, when I went to visit him at the Art Center, he looked very much on the timid side; hardly noticeable, in fact. But he had been accepted, that was the main thing.¹⁶⁰

Elizabeth's campaign to have her work accepted as a 'bona fide craft' by the Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen was successful enough by 1969 to allow for irony and a little private triumphalism. In announcing the exhibition of Amos to her *Newsletter* readers and yarn customers, Elizabeth warned them to "bring your smelling salts".¹⁶¹ Despite her success with the WDC, Elizabeth's papers show no later exhibition with them past 1971. Her 1970 and 1971 exhibits returned to her more typical garments with the Appalachian Sweater in 1970, and a pair of poncho and cap combinations in 1971.

Elizabeth's work in regular exhibition with the WDC in its most professional categories spanned thirteen years from 1958 to 1971, and included several of her most important and famous designs. Her description of her "Amos" hanging hinted at her continued frustration with stereotypes and assumptions around knitting as an artisan practice even as late as 1969, after eleven years of exhibition, and fourteen years of design for national and international publication. While the archival record gives us little information on the close of Elizabeth's career with the WDC, it is certainly clear that her

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 178.

¹⁶¹ Elizabeth Zimmermann, Newsletter #22, *The Opinionated Knitter: Elizabeth Zimmermann Newsletters 1958-1968*. (Marshfield WI: Schoolhouse Press, 2005). 109.

work with them was only her opening salvo in her long work in having knitting recognized as professional craftsmanship by both knitters and traditional crafts people.

2.3 Early Design Sales: Patterns for Industry and the incompatibility of “Craftsman” and “Industry Designer”

Recognition of Elizabeth’s professionalism was much quicker in coming from the knitting industry. From her earliest design sale in 1954 and through the following decade, Elizabeth’s designs were included in nearly every midcentury publication that included handicraft in the US, including various *Women’s Day* publications, *McCall’s Needlework and Craft*, *Vogue Knitting* and *Vogue Pattern Book*,¹⁶² and in many yarn manufacturer’s design booklets such as Bernat, Spinnerin, Pauline Denham and Mon Tricot. Elizabeth designed patterns working with such yarn brands as Mary Maxim, Corticelli, Armstrong, Jaeger, Newland, Unger, Coats & Clark, Regal and the American Thread Company, as well as for her own yarns through Cambridge, Stansfield and Tulloch.¹⁶³ Yet, despite her satisfaction and delight in her professional success in placing her designs in major knitting publications, Elizabeth’s developing sense of the possibilities of knitting as true craftsmanship, and her indignation over industry’s resistance to new techniques, could not allow her to rest uncritically within the traditional industry-publication-designer triad. Within a few short years, Elizabeth found herself driven to find a direct path to American

¹⁶² These publishers all published both their flagship periodicals plus further annual and special collections in which Elizabeth’s designs were printed.

¹⁶³ An informal and incomplete scrapbook of clippings and patterns, “Elizabeth’s Binder”, was assembled by Elizabeth herself in her later years and was used by the researcher as a guide to at least the early design sales.

knitters that allowed her a fuller exploration of craftsmanship in conversation with other knitters.

Elizabeth's first design publications were with *Woman's Day* Magazine. Her first publication, a simple man's wool beret, was published in October 1954, in a "For you to make, For him to wear" feature by Roxa Wright, Editor of the *Woman's Day* Needlework Department.¹⁶⁴ With no design or yarn credits, the directions were straightforward, very brief and typical of most knitting patterns. This unremarkable first publication stood in strong contrast to her second publication only 3 months later in the January 1955 issue. Her ideas for Norwegian Ski Sweaters were offered a highly unusual and much expanded platform for the discussion of her ideas and her designs. In her unpublished manuscript of 1971, Elizabeth describes her first design sale¹⁶⁵:

In the middle Fifties, I achieved three ski-sweaters that looked admirable even to me, and which embodied some fairly revolutionary ideas. I was inspired to pack them up, with notes on their constructions, and send them to a widely distributed woman's magazine with an excellent reputation for knitting designs. I told nobody, and after the first agitation of sending off the package, succeeded in putting the whole matter out of my mind... In due course, a letter arrived with a famous name on it. I was all of a sudden so jumpy that I circled around it for about an hour, putting off opening it by excuses about breakfast-dishes and bed-making, and so on. When I at last opened it, it contained an offer for \$150. ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY DOLLARS! You may imagine no more housework was done that day. My design period was launched and lasted for over 10 years. I still sell designs occasionally ...¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Roxa Wright, "For you to make, for him to wear", *Woman's Day*, October 1954, p.98-99.

¹⁶⁵ To be clear, publications dates do not equate with submission or sale dates. While the beret was published prior to the Norwegian Sweater article, the sweaters and article were probably purchased by *Woman's Day* earlier. Elizabeth always referred to the Norwegian Sweaters as her first design sale.

¹⁶⁶ Elizabeth Zimmermann, "Lost Document: January 27th, Wednesday", (unpublished manuscript), 32. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

Woman's Day had accepted two of the three sweaters submitted by Elizabeth, and her “notes on their construction” for an early 1955 publication.

The *Woman's Day* issue of January 1955 included Elizabeth's ski sweater design in an article entitled “Norwegian Sweaters: The Easy Way” with a prominent byline and approximately 1000 words at her disposal for the exhortation of new methods of knitting and thinking about knitting. With this space, Elizabeth managed to touch on several of the key concepts that would mark her work over the next several decades. These include her dislike of particular current practices, her advancement of certain principles of knitting design, her introduction of several specific techniques that were highly unusual in American knitting, and her exhortation to American knitters to generate their own designs. It also included her acknowledgement of her family, a persistent theme in much of her writing, and a source of great charm for many of her later readers, as a driving force in her design work over the next many decades.

Elizabeth began with her dislikes: of purling, of twisting yarns for color changes, of constant graph and chart reading, and of changing hands for color knitting. Her language here is uncharacteristically strong: “I hate purling...I hate twisting yarns...I hate complicated graphs ... I hate the interminable putting down of one color and picking up the other”¹⁶⁷ Yet these techniques were very typical of American color knitting and hardly to be avoided in most ski sweater patterns. But within these parameters, Elizabeth introduced her family as a driving force in her work:

¹⁶⁷ Elizabeth Zimmermann, “Norwegian Ski Sweaters the Easy Way” *Woman's Day*, January 1955, 42-43, 119-120, with directions 110-111. Quote from page 42. Meg Swanson remarks that Elizabeth's language here was unusually vehement and she could think of no other instance in which Elizabeth used the word ‘hate’ in her later work.

“But my children were equally determined to have ski sweaters! So I beat my brains out and licked all four difficulties, evolving a Norwegian garment which was the envy of the sixth grade; and now I make such sweaters in all sizes for my growing-up family.”¹⁶⁸

This insertion of domesticity was certainly not unusual in *Woman’s Day Magazine* in this period, as a self-consciously working class woman’s consumer publication, but did match the relatively permanent tone for much of Elizabeth’s work throughout her career and in all of her own writing.

Elizabeth continued with a short exposition on basic principles of knitting design with “the theory” behind sizing of color patterned sweaters with regard to a roomy ease of fit that would prevent stretching and distortion of the color patterns, and the need for simplicity of design with no armhole shaping, straight sleeve construction and a “dropped shoulder line that is classic, effective and comfortable.”¹⁶⁹ Elizabeth detailed her design as taking advantage of knitting’s easy production of a tube structure by the use of circular needles. This offered the American knitter several advantages and removed a number of Elizabeth’s ‘dislikes’. Circular knitting avoided all purling and consistently allowed the knitter to view her work from the front as she knit a continuous spiral tube (a shape well suited to the human torso and arms). This simplified color-pattern knitting as it removed “the constant necessity of peering over the top whenever you are doing a purl row” on the back side, and allowed the knitter to follow a pattern visually on the knitting, without constant reversion to printed materials.¹⁷⁰ But circular knitting in America had been largely limited to skirt construction and its introduction into sweater construction was

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 42, 119.

highly innovative, especially with regard to the armhole treatment. Elizabeth's design consisted of a knit torso tube, and two knit arm tubes, with armholes cut into the torso and the sleeves sewn onto the body.

But what about the circular needle when you divide for the armholes? *Don't* divide for the armholes! Just go on knitting a tube, and bind off loosely. Then, though it may give you heart failure, take dressmaking shears, and slash the armholes. It's not nearly so *awful* as it *sounds*, and I can assure you that my authority is a genuine Norwegian sweater. I discovered that the true Scandinavian knitter virtually cuts her sweaters out of hand-knitted tubing. Even jackets are slashed down the front. The secret lies in the use of the sewing machine.¹⁷¹

Elizabeth hoped that the horror felt by most American knitters by her proposal that they cut their knitting would be offset by the number of advantages offered by this technique. But she offered her readers several other new techniques as well. She counseled that color patterns be restricted to short repeats in order to avoid the tedious necessity of twisting the color yarns at the back of the knitting, that the knitter alternate wide and narrow color bands that facilitated memorized color charting (rather than frequent stoppages in knitting and reversion to printed charts) and that the knitter learn both the English and German methods of knitting which would allow a knitter to knit two-handed continuously, with a color in each hand, dramatically speeding the work by doing away with the need to drop one color to pick up the next. All of these techniques were designed to offer the American knitter a faster, less tedious and more intuitive manner of knitting, and one that would allow the knitter to view and understand her work as a whole garment rather than as a highly discrete set of individual instructions. This was atypical of American knitting in the extreme with its firm basis in dressmaking principles. Most

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 119.

typical American patterns offered no exposition of construction or design techniques, and only very occasionally a line drawing detailing the shape and relationship of various flat pieces.

This unusually lengthy article allowed Elizabeth to introduce principles of garment construction specific to knitting rather than to dressmaking, with the introduction of knit-and-cut tube structures, the ability to view the front of the knitting continuously and manage complicated designs without constant reversion to printed patterns. All of these techniques added up to a far more comprehensible practice of knitting with greater opportunities for custom design by the knitter herself:

I have dozens of patterns filed away already and keep finding more in cross-stitch books or old samplers. When you've had a little experience and know what you want, it's no trick at all to make up your own. You can repeat the same pattern throughout or make a point of knitting a whole sweater, without repeating a single pattern. (I almost did it for Design No. 1) You can use contrasting colors for the wide and narrow patterns or just do the whole job in one background color and one pattern color.¹⁷²

This encouragement to make their own design decisions may be the most unusual among all of Elizabeth's exhortations for exploration. Contemporary American patterns rarely offered variations from the printed design in any form and frankly discouraged knitters from making substitutions.

Elizabeth would have limited opportunities to continue these exhortations on the national stage over the next few years despite very regular publication of her designs. Industry designers by and large sold designs, not copy, and standard industry directions, highly edited by the publication, offered very little space for variations or discussions of

¹⁷² Ibid., 120.

design principles. Elizabeth published four further times in 1955 across a variety of publications. *Woman's Day* March 1955 included her design for a "Tyrolean Jacket" with hood in garter stitch (a very early version of the sweater eventually named and known as the Tomten) but provided no design credit.¹⁷³ The yarn manufacturer Bernat published a pair of children's versions of the adult man's beret in their *Bernat Handicrafter*, Book No. 46 "Accessories for Children"¹⁷⁴ but again with no design credit or opportunity for expounding upon knitting techniques or ideas. The Fall-Winter 1955-1956 *McCall's Needlework* published a Zimmermann design in their Canadian issue that included four sizes and two variations as matching mother-daughter and father-son sweaters. Under the title "A Sweater that Everyone Likes," Elizabeth (with no design credits and with yarns supplied by five different manufacturers) showed "Picturesque Indian-type designs in four colors".¹⁷⁵ Despite the fact that these sweaters featured the same 'revolutionary' techniques of circular knitting in multiple colors with slashed and sewn armholes, and upped the ante by including the cardigan versions which required the slashing of the full front opening, *McCall's* offered no space for exposition or encouragement around these new techniques.

It was only in the final publication of that year, the December 1955 issue of *Woman's Day*, that Elizabeth received design credit again for her "Four Pattern variations

¹⁷³ "Tyrolean Sweater" *Woman's Day*, March 1955. 128.

¹⁷⁴ "Accessories for Children", *Bernat Handicrafter*, Book No. 46, 1955. Style # 5780 and 5821. pp.18-19.

¹⁷⁵ "A Sweater that Everyone Likes". *McCall's Needlework and Craft* Fall Winter 1955-56 with Canadian Supplement. (McCall's Corporation, New York) 80B-80C, 80F, 80K. The Canadian issue of *McCall's Needlework* was identical to the American version but included a separately page numbered supplementary section for Canadian subscribers and vendors. Furthermore, It is a little unclear just which "Indians" *McCall's* is referring to with this description/title. Elizabeth's designs here are far more related in technique and design to the traditional Fair Isle patterns of her native England than to the Salish and Cowichan style sweaters then becoming popular in Canada and the United States.

for a Knitted Pillbox” cap, yet there was no copy explaining either the design or its variations.¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, Elizabeth’s yarn sales business received its first notice in the fine print of the directions. After recommending first Columbia Minerva Lustra Sparkletone Rug Yarns in a variety of suggested colors, the Needlework Department directions allowed that generic “knitting worsted may be substituted” or “unbleached sheep’s wool may be used” and that “The cap photographed was made of 2 ply Sheep’s Wool in natural cream and oatmeal colors” and these yarns were available for purchase through “Mrs. Elizabeth Zimmermann” of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, with prices and address provided.¹⁷⁷ In all, Elizabeth published at least three cap designs (with variations), and three sweater designs (with variations) in 1955.

This entrance into professional design was dramatically enlarged upon in 1956 with a further nine sweater designs, two small vests, five varieties of head coverings, a set of flexibly sized mittens, and her Woodsman’s Socks across the same publications, *McCall’s Needlework and Craft* (Summer 1956, and the Canadian issue of Fall Winter 56-57), two separate Bernat pamphlets, and both the 1956 issue of *Woman’s Day* and in their 1956 *Woman’s Day Big Book of Knitting* collection).¹⁷⁸ Similar to her previous experience, only *Woman’s Day* offered limited and only occasional credit for either yarn

¹⁷⁶ “Four Pattern Variations for a Knitted Pillbox; Designs by Elizabeth Zimmermann”, *Woman’s Day* December 1955. 76.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 84.

¹⁷⁸ *McCall’s Needlework and Craft*, Spring Summer 1956, “Butterfly Vest and Daytime Bolero”. pp.35, 81.; *Bernat Handicrafter Book #53* “The Big Book of Ski and Sports Sweaters for Men, Women and Youngsters” “Style #510” pp. 32, 35.; *Bernat Handicrafter #54* “Gift Bazaar” Style # 3865 p. 9.; *The Woman’s Day Annual Big Book of Knitting* (1956), “Garter Stitch Suit Blouse” p.12, “Raglan Jacket” p.13, “Cardigan with Mitered Shaping” p.14, “Ribbed Tyrolean After Ski Jacket” p. 17, “Woodsman’s Socks” p. 89, “Ski Mittens” p. 90 and “Skating Bonnet” p.92.; *McCall’s Needlework and Craft* with Canadian Section, Fall Winter 1956-57, “Misses Sports Sweater” pp. 80-1, 80-14, “Bulky Knit Sweater” pp. 80-2, 80-16, “Men’s Siwash Sweater” pp 80-3-80-8, and “Child’s Sweater and Cap” pp. 80-5, 80-16.; *Woman’s Day Magazine*, December 1956 “Pattern Knitting Goes to your head”pp.61, 78-79.

or designs and in no case was Elizabeth's knitting philosophy again explored at length despite the enormously inventive variety of sweater designs in Elizabeth's 1956 list. These designs included further variations on her Norwegian Ski sweater's drop shoulder construction, several designs in seamless raglan construction worked from the neck down, a very different version of a "Ribbed Tyrolean After-Ski" jacket (no apparent relation to previous year's), and a very clever "Cardigan with Mitered Shaping" which knit the neckline, lower edge and front bands in a single wide shaped piece before knitting in the body and sleeves. She also sold several garter stitch designs and including designs knit from 'hand to hand' sideways across the body rather than up or down from neck to lower edge, and a design in *McCall's* titled by them as a "Misses Sports Sweater" but named in Elizabeth's records as "Prototype Yoke Sweater"¹⁷⁹ These designs featured both color and texture based designs, and explored a number of structural innovations exploring design principles for knitting. All of these designs touch on what were to become key design elements in Elizabeth's work for many years to come but it is also in this year that Elizabeth's designs and patterns began to see resistance from parts of the industry in her drive towards the introduction of new methods of working for American knitting.

The response by industry to Elizabeth's work to introduce new conceptualizations around knitting design were varied with some merely publishing her new ideas without comment or explanation, and others re-writing and re-designing her work to some extent.

¹⁷⁹ Editors commonly retitled designs to suit their purposes but the archival collection at Schoolhouse Press does include the printed image and directions of the "Misses Sports Sweater" for the *McCall's N&C* Fall Winter 1956-57 but the envelope containing this material is labeled with the type "Prototype Yoke Sweater, McCall's 1956."

Elizabeth's work in 1956 continued to feature her circular knit drop shoulder construction made public in the 1955 Norwegian Ski Sweater *Woman's Day* article, but resistance to new techniques in the form of editorial re-writing of this pattern began to occur in the 1956 publications of *Bernat* and *McCall's*. Though *McCall's Needlework and Craft* Fall Winter 1956-57 did retain Elizabeth's drop shoulder construction in their publication of the "Men's Siwash Sweater", the "Child's Sweater and Cap" was re-written as flat knit in sectional elements for front, back, and sleeves and with sewn assembly. The *Bernat Handicrafter Book #53 Big Book of Ski and Sports Sweaters for Men, Women and Youngsters* showed the same editorial license, taking Elizabeth's circular knit drop shouldered ski sweater for adults and re-writing the directions for flat knit elements sewn together as for dressmaking. Yet this editorializing was variously applied. In the same issue of *McCall's*, the editorial group retained Elizabeth's highly original design and technically innovative directions (though with no space for exposition regarding these new techniques) for her circular knit and nearly completely seamless prototype yoke sweater, a sweater whose re-writing in 1958 by Bernat would have long lasting consequences.

Nineteen fifty-seven was a banner year for Elizabeth's design and yarn sales in large part due to her 1956 meeting with and work for *Vogue Knitting*. Having traveled to New York City in order to show the editors "a number of her designs", Elizabeth's unbleached natural colored two ply Sheepswool yarn excited a great deal of editorial interest.¹⁸⁰ The U. S. *Vogue* editors, having recently received knitting directions for an

¹⁸⁰ Meg Swanson, *The Opinionated Knitter*. (Marshfield WI; Schoolhouse Press, 2005). 70.

Aran sweater from the British *Vogue* editors, were as unfamiliar with Arans as most of America at that time. They were puzzled as to how to proceed with the unfamiliar terms of cable knitting. Elizabeth's wool yarn seemed eminently suited to the Aran project but she refused to divulge her yarn source. *Vogue* quickly commissioned Elizabeth to knit a prototype from the directions using her unbleached natural Sheepswool and Elizabeth spent the family's camping trip along the Mississippi that summer of 1956 working out the methodology for Aran knitting. Her 1974 publication, *Knitter's Almanac*, described her process:

All day long, in perfect early summer weather, we were dandled by the milky ripples of the young but already mighty Miss. I puzzled over the directions which included no picture of what I was actually making; the unaccustomed terms of Back Twist and Forward Twist made themselves gradually at home in my brain...¹⁸¹

According to Meg's recollection in *The Opinionated Knitter*, Elizabeth had accepted this commission without having an understanding about the fee, and Elizabeth submitted the finished sweater with no agreement on payment.¹⁸² Only its publication (with a second Elizabeth design) in the *Vogue Pattern Book*, the sewing periodical, resolved the dilemma. The *Vogue* editors had mentioned Elizabeth Zimmermann prominently as the source of yarns for both sweaters.¹⁸³ Though Elizabeth and Meg retold the story of the design in several publications as an iconic origins story, Elizabeth went a bit farther and described the aftermath of her design success in her unpublished 1971 manuscript:

My first big start came in 1957, when Vogue Pattern published two of my sweaters—an Aran and a ski-sweater—and gave my name as a

¹⁸¹ Elizabeth Zimmermann, *Knitter's Almanac*, (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1974, reprint by Dover, 1981), 75.

¹⁸² Meg Swanson, *The Opinionated Knitter: Elizabeth Zimmermann's Newsletters, 1958-1969*. (Pittsfield, WI: Schoolhouse Press, 2005), 70.

¹⁸³ "Imported Sweaters", *Vogue Pattern Book*, February-March 1957, p. 58-59, 60, 68, 73-74.

source for the appropriate wools to make them. 2 Ply Cream Sheepswool for the Aran, and Fisherman Yarn for the ski-sweater. The resulting mail nearly washed us into Lake Michigan; I had no idea of the power of Vogue. The whole house became an office; I bombarded the mill with wool-orders; the mill's machinery broke down; everything happened. Thousands of people must have made those sweaters from my wool. What they didn't know, and how could they? was how long the sweaters were to last. I still occasionally get a letter from a faintly-remembered name, saying that the ancient sweater is still going strong and that the writer wants to make another one.¹⁸⁴

This boost to Elizabeth's yarn sales business resulted in a much enlarged customer list for Elizabeth, and Elizabeth took advantage of this list to begin her own chatty "Dear Knitter" letter to her customers:

...when my Wool Trade was in its infancy, I felt the need to communicate with my customers, who were all mail-order. Money was, of course, short, so I connived with my printer, used some trimming he happened to have, and had him run off a long skinny "Dear Knitter" letter, telling of new wools, designs which I had recently had published and various items of knitting chatter. There were two issues of this early newsletter.¹⁸⁵

Those original two newsletters are no longer extant but are likely to have mentioned her other designs of 1957. These include a Bias Sleeve top in garter stitch,¹⁸⁶ a sideways garter stitch "Suspender Sweater" knit from side seam to side seam,¹⁸⁷ and a "Men's Sport Pullover" constructed as a nearly seamless yoke sweater with an interesting garter stitch neck treatment.¹⁸⁸ Elizabeth's further designs for 1957 all involve variations and improvements on the earlier flat knit and sewn assembly Aran design for *Vogue*. She completed only "two versions of the sweater worked back and forth on straight needles"

¹⁸⁴ Elizabeth Zimmermann, "Lost Document: Tuesday, June 13th" (unpublished manuscript), 259. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., "January 26th, Tuesday." 27.

¹⁸⁶ *Vogue Knitting Book*, Spring Summer 1957. 13,43.

¹⁸⁷ "Fashions and Fun for the 'Almost Teens'" *Bernat Handicrafter* Book No. 59, 1957. 4, 41.

¹⁸⁸ *McCall's Needlework and Craft* with Canadian Section, Fall Winter 1957-1957. 80-2, 80-10.

before converting to the “easier and more sensible” process of circular knitting, “with the front of the work always facing the knitter”¹⁸⁹. Her two ‘improved’ Aran designs for the 1957 November issue of *Woman’s Day*, and the *Vogue Knitting Book* Fall Winter 1957 issue both included circular knit construction. The *Vogue* design followed her almost seamless circular knit Aran textured yoke construction while the *Woman’s Day* pattern featured a circular knit torso sewn to a fully Aran textured section knit from hand to hand across the shoulders.¹⁹⁰

Throughout this period, Elizabeth’s sweater designs exhibited a wide array of her new techniques applied across a variety of colors and textures. She juggled her circular knit drop shoulder construction and her nearly seamless circular knit yoke sweater across pullovers and cardigans in both color and texture patterns. Based in basic principles of knitting, her sweater constructions could be matched with very nearly any color combinations or texture stitches to create a near infinite variety of individual sweaters. Yet the differences in reception between her work as a studio knitter and her work as an industry designer could not have been starker. While the Wisconsin Designer Craftsman, once having accepted her into their membership, was content to judge each submitted work as a finished product of her clear and professional craftsmanship, industry publications insisted on their right to purchase a design and proceed to re-design her work process with an eye to their understanding of the American knitter. As a craftsman, Elizabeth’s process was respected as part of her professionalism; as a designer, Elizabeth was expected to disappear once the sale had been finalized, and to have no further voice

¹⁸⁹ Elizabeth Zimmermann. *Knitting Around*. (Pittsville, WI: Schoolhouse Press, 1989). 163.

¹⁹⁰ “Round Necked Sweater with Aran Isle Yoke”, *Vogue Knitting Book* Fall and Winter 1957. 30, 61-62. And “How to Dress for the Outdoor Life” *Woman’s Day*, November 1957 p. 79.

in either the presentation of the design, or the description of the process. As a craftsman, Elizabeth's work had integrity; as a designer, her work was merely the raw material in the relationship between manufacturer, publisher and consumer, and susceptible to manipulation as the publishers saw fit.

Elizabeth's recognized expertise in these matters was just now becoming undeniable to the Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen with her 1958 admission to the Annual Show but she was in receipt of other local and regional recognition as well, and she took advantage of each opportunity to spread her philosophy of knitting. Two newspaper articles, collected in the Schoolhouse Press archives, offer insights into Elizabeth's early knitting life and show her persistence in her efforts to convert American knitters to new ideas and techniques. The tone of the articles, and the clear astonished approval of the writers, must have provided Elizabeth with some assurance of the probable welcome reception of these novelties by American knitters.

Elizabeth's local paper, the *Shorewood Herald*, featured her and her Norwegian Ski Sweaters in a 1955 article. Set largely as a good natured tussle between Elizabeth and her children in their desire for ski sweaters, and with the encouragement of her husband Arnold, the article notes her process of discovery in avoiding purling, tangled color changing, and graphs from her earliest efforts through the sales of the sweater to Woman's Day. The reporter, Liz Kip, was clearly deeply impressed by the novelty and cleverness of Elizabeth's techniques, particularly that of cutting the knit fabric:

If you didn't realize that here was a woman who knew what she was doing, it would give you the screaming meemies to watch some of her operations. She knits great sheathes, then cuts and slashes with a rare

abandon, but it all comes right in the end. You feel here is genius at work!¹⁹¹

Clearly a knitter herself, Kip recognized the profitable nature of Elizabeth's knitting genius even in this earliest part of her design career, noting that Elizabeth's knitting for her children had "turned into a lucrative home industry, snowballing to the point where her earnings can include magnificent holidays abroad," that is, thirteen year old Meg's 1955 summer visit to her English grandparents.¹⁹²

This recognition of her knitting prowess and the astonishing nature of her innovations was to continue at a larger scale in the June 18, 1958, issue of the *Milwaukee Journal* on the front page of the women's section. In an multi-paged article with multiple color images titled "Summer's Indolence can produce Autumn's Sweaters", Marylyn Gardner, of the *Journal* Staff, featured Elizabeth resting in the shade while Arnold fished, and designing as she is knitting, having cast off the conventional "prescribed patterns and methods".¹⁹³ Elizabeth was granted ample space in making her knitting position clear:

Mrs. Zimmermann's main complaint with most knitting is that it's done on the same principle as dressmaking. You knit several pieces, then sew them together to make a garment, just as if you were working with fabric. 'Knitting can be distinct from dressmaking' she maintains, 'There are so many possibilities in knitting which are completely out of the question for a dressmaker. You can widen, decrease or shape knitting just as you want it.'¹⁹⁴

Gardner details nearly complete instructions for the cutting of knit fabric, avoiding purling through circular needles, and holding the yarn in the German (left hand) style.

¹⁹¹ Liz Kip, "Tend to your Knitting: Elizabeth Zimmermann find it pay dividends to provide trips Abroad" *The Shorewood Journal*, n.d. no pagination, circa 1955. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Marylyn Gardner, "Summer's Indolence can produce Autumn's Sweaters" *Milwaukee Journal*, June 18, 1958. Woman's Pages, 1,4.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 4.

Elizabeth also related the finding of the Cambridge Mills yarn and the Stansfield Red Label while on camping trips in Minnesota and Canada. The article further featured three full-color images of various Elizabeth Zimmermann designs including a professional model in her seamless yoke sweater, her daughters Meg and Lloie in their favorite 1955 Indian styles sweaters, and Elizabeth herself in a scarlet and white cardigan version of a calligraphic patterned sweater. The excited tone and extended detail of both these articles must have tremendously encouraged Elizabeth to think that her new ideas would be very well accepted by knitters, if she only had the chance to speak to them.

Yet she received no such encouragement from her industry work. With the single exception of the January, 1955, *Woman's Day* publication of her article on the Norwegian Sweaters, Elizabeth had no opportunities for that greater exposition of the principles of knitting construction as she entered into the industry designer role. In fact, editorial boards in all these publications not only rendered her invisible by refusing most design credits, they readily made changes to her design instructions as they saw fit, re-writing her innovative constructions into standard knit flat and sewn assembly instructions as more appropriate to their reading of the American market. Bernat was the most consistent in their rewriting of Elizabeth's designs, and her frustration at their resistance to her innovations came to a peak in 1958.

Elizabeth's 1958 publications included variations on both her circular knit drop shoulder and her nearly seamless circular knit yoke designs. The *McCall's Needlework and Craft*, Fall Winter, 1958-59, carried two of her designs. Her design for Regal Ram Yarns in their knitting worsted yarn, "Scottish Sweater and Tam" featured an application of texture to her basic template and the directions provide her full instructions for

construction with circular needles. The design for Bernat Yarns featured both a cardigan and a pullover with Aran textured sleeves, “Irish Sleeve Pullover and Cardigan”¹⁹⁵ but the directions provided direct the knitter to knit flat front and back elements with sewn assembly, a technique Elizabeth had long eschewed.

Bernat repeated this editorial re-writing in their own publication of that year, *Bernat Handicrafter Book 67*, “The School and College Look” with a new design of her nearly seamless circular knit yoke sweater, a construction previously published in both *McCalls* and *Vogue Knitting Book*. The *McCall’s Needlework and Craft* of Fall Winter, 1956-57, had published the “Misses Sport Sweater” with a color patterned yoke, while the Fall Winter, 1957-58, with Canadian Section issue featured a heavily color patterned Scandinavian pullover for men with the same construction. *Vogue Knitting Book* featured a textured version of the same construction in their “Round Necked Sweater with Aran Isle Yoke” for men.¹⁹⁶ In all of these publications, Elizabeth’s innovative construction technique was published as written by her. Bernat, however, published Elizabeth’s designs for a pullover and a cardigan, replacing her directions with their own American standard directions for flat knitting in sections with long full length seams at the sides, and full length sleeve seams, despite the use of Elizabeth’s models which showed no seams whatsoever.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ “Irish Sleeve Pullover and Cardigan” and “Scottish Tam and Sweater” *McCall’s Needlework and Craft*, Fall Winter 1958-59. 35, 56-57, 65.

¹⁹⁶ “Misses Sport Sweater” *McCall’s Needlework and Craft*, Canadian Section, Fall Winter 1956-7. 80-1, 80-14. “Men’s Sports Pullover” *McCall’s Needlework and Craft*, Canadian Section, Fall Winter 1957-58. 80-2, 80-10. And “Round Necked Sweater with Aran Isle Yoke” *Vogue Knitting Book*, Winter 1957, p.30, 61-62.

¹⁹⁷ “The School and College Look” *Bernat Handicrafter Book 67*. 1958. 16, 23, 51-52.

Elizabeth's frustration at Bernat was acute, to say the least. Though this is an origins story told in multiple Zimmermann publications, the 1971 unpublished manuscript version provided this fuller version: ¹⁹⁸

...in 1958, I became good and mad at what occasionally happened to my original designs, ~~once they had been bought and~~ which I sold and which were published in knitting magazines (books)

Quite apart from printer's errors...there was sometimes a certain amount of editorial manipulation of my instructions, which led to the mutilation of some of my favorite and—I thought—rather good ideas. The one that really blew my gasket was the design for a very pretty yoke-sweater—so pretty, in fact, that it was chosen for a cover-shot, in colour, on a dazzoing (sic) blond.

My directions had the sweater-body and sleeves made on circular needles, united at the under-arms, and the yoke made also on a circular needle, with a nice piece of neck-back shaping, so that the sweater would fit properly.

I found, to my dismay, that the published directions called for body-front, body-back, and sleeves to be made back and forth on straight needles, and sewn up. The yoke was made on a circular needle—they could hardly avoid this—but the back-of-neck shaping was cut out completely. Thus, the poor knitters, encouraged by the stunning cover-shot, would end up with a seamed sweater (although the cover clearly showed no seams) and a neck-back which would expose the first half dozen neck-vertebrae, and cause the wearer to be cold and miserable. In fact, the whole sweater was not as represented, and hardly original at all, but for the yoke.

I was good and mad.

All right, I said. I'll put out my own directions. I took this self-same sweater, substituted different colour patterns for the yoke, and had the printer run off a thousand direction sheets at .25 apiece, and announced this fact in my second long skinny newsletter.

Demand was much less than staggering.

All right, I said again, if they won't pay for it, they shall damned well take it for free; somehow I will ram my designs down people's throats. I designed a ski sweater, put No. 2 and the date at the top, and sent it to everyone on my modest mailing list...In my fever of generosity I even added a second sheet of pattern-graphs, so that knitters could vary them, and thus 'design' their own sweaters.

Response was good, and I kept up these semi-annual newsletters for eleven years, charging .25 for them to non-customers. As they sold out,

¹⁹⁸ This unpublished manuscript contains some re-writing and proofreading corrections in Elizabeth's handwriting. I am using blue font to note Elizabeth's rewriting but will simply incorporate her proofing corrections into the text.

I had them re-printed, and sometimes revised them, eliminating out-of-date chitchat. But good old #1 I shall never revise; it is so very homemade; so very badly laid out. It is my firstborn, about which I am sentimental.¹⁹⁹

Thus was born Elizabeth's first attempts to directly address American knitters outside of the standard industry paradigm of yarn manufacturer and periodical publications. Her newsletter was to run, free to her yarn customers, for the eleven years noted above until the Spring of 1969 issue when it had "well over a thousand" issued.²⁰⁰ At that point, its production required 4 months unpaid labor by Elizabeth and "the Family (had) started grumbling that I was being ill-remunerated".²⁰¹ She re-designed the newsletter into a larger format, renamed it, *Wool Gathering*, and charged \$1 each issue, though free to current customers. It has continued in publication since that time, continuing after Elizabeth's final retirement in 1989 in the capable hands of her daughter Meg Swanson and Schoolhouse Press.

The Newsletters, Elizabeth's first attempts to directly address her audience of American knitters, was to be only her first foray into a new method of communication and it would be followed by television programs, book authorship, and knitting camps. Yet with her semiannual letter to her customers, Elizabeth had found a new resolution to her dilemma between artisan craftsmanship and industry designer. Sure of herself as a craftsman, with the complete right to innovation in her work, and encouraged to think her innovations would be highly welcomed by American knitters, Elizabeth generated a new voice for herself, and it was a voice that was personal and spoke out of a deep creativity

¹⁹⁹ Elizabeth Zimmermann, "Lost Document: January 26th. Tuesday." [unpublished manuscript], 27-28. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

²⁰⁰ Elizabeth Zimmermann, *Wool Gathering* #1, Sept 1969, Schoolhouse Press, Marshfield WI, 1.

²⁰¹ Elizabeth Zimmermann, "Lost Document: January 26th. Tuesday." [unpublished manuscript], 29. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

born in domesticity and artisanship. For Elizabeth, there was no need to compartmentalize these separately. In so speaking, she helped generate a new audience, a new identity for American knitters as skilled craftspeople rather than simply domestic consumers. Dorothy Holland and Jean Lave in *History in Person* use Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding of the dialogic nature of identity and the emergence of new and reshaped identity out of the give and take of multiple voices as they encounter novel situations.²⁰² Elizabeth's new voice in the *Newsletters* was to find ready and willing ears among American knitters who were open to alternatives of expression, methodology and identity in their knitting and in their communities of practice.

²⁰² Dorothy Holland and Jean Lave, *History in Person: Enduring Struggles, Contentious Practice, Intimate Identities*. (Albuquerque NM: School of American Research Press, 2001).3-20.

CHAPTER 3. “DEAR KNITTER”

In its simplest statement, Elizabeth’s address in her *Newsletters* of her audience as “Dear Knitter” was a call-out to those who could imagine an identity as ‘knitter’ different than that portrayed up to that point in the public sphere of industry publications and women’s magazines. As an initial hailing, ‘dear knitter’ opened a dialogue between knitters as Elizabeth’s *Newsletter* readers, television students, and book readers engaged with her ideas and, who, in very many cases, wrote back to her. Elizabeth’s alternative conceptualization about the identity of knitters and the practice of knitting articulated and modeled in her print and video publications mounted a strong and durable challenge to both the knitting industry status quo of Chapter 1, and an alternative to the professionalizing versions of craftsmanship taking shape in the Wisconsin Designer Craftsman through the influence of the embryonic American Craft Council in Chapter 2. Elizabeth’s generation of this alternative path that contained both professional quality levels of craftsmanship and an easy elision with domesticity will be examined in her publications in both print and video. This alternate path of craftsmanship had both serious resonance with the new ACC model, as analyzed by Sandra Alfoldy, and yet struck out in new directions of individual craftsmanship as personal liberation within a more communitarian context, rather than an exclusionary professionalism.

The various intersecting trajectories around professionalism, domesticity, craftsmanship and knitting in this period are extraordinarily complex. One strand between craftsmanship and professionalism is explicated by Sandra Alföldy in her work on the professionalizing activity of the American Craft Council within its context in the aesthetics of modern art. My own analysis in the previous chapter of the Wisconsin Designer Craftsman's increasingly specific boundaries around membership bears out her conceptualizations. All of these show an increasing attention to the differentiation between the professional craftsman and the amateur based on exclusive knowledge and practices. The professionalizing nature of the home economics text of Ida Riley Duncan's work, with its firm grasp on the boundary between professional shop owner and customer/knitter provides a secondary example, specific to knitting, of professionalizing craft practices that contribute to a firm boundary between "professional practitioners" and everyone else. All of these sources support Alföldy's description of professionalizing craftsmen as new structures of identity based in an exclusive membership and the sharp differentiation between the creative-professional and domestic life.

While most interested in the social and cultural forces that made distinct Canadian responses, Alföldy provides a persuasive analysis of the US craft environment in its response to increasing numbers of women moving into craft and craft businesses. Alföldy identifies Aileen Osborne Webb's stated goal of differentiation between the mass craft practices of the home and community and the craft practices of the modern art world as a driver of craft professionalism in the post war period.²⁰³ Like all such forces, the craft

²⁰³ Sandra Alföldy, *Crafting Identity: the development of professional fine craft in Canada*. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005) 5.

professionalization of North America was, according to Alfoldy, built on principles of exclusionary membership, the conservation and standardization of specialist knowledge and practices, and the structuring of bureaucracies that would support, regulate and reward these methodologies. In the emerging world of professional craft, this took shape within the context of an increasing number of women pursuing craft practices outside of previously approved gender roles, and, the modern art aesthetic that “stressed innovation, technical experimentation, and the privileging of the conceptual over the traditional and the utilitarian.”²⁰⁴ The American Craft Council structured itself around exclusionary practices such as the new Master of Fine Arts degree; the institution of academic positions in craft practice (with their attendant publications and conferences); the reflexive and reinforcing nature of academic and professional identities that made up the new craft organizations and handed out professional rewards such as grants and inclusion in exhibitions; and the public notice of media coverage. These boundaries around professionalization were highly class-based as contemporary craft professionals under these conditions had high levels of education and conceptual ability, were self-employed within a strongly bounded community, and within a “closed system of power” composed of recognized and accepted hierarchies.²⁰⁵ Alfoldy notes a set of standard markers for professional craft practice which included experiments in new techniques, natural colorations and subtle ornamentation, interest in recovered or “foreign” techniques; a value for theorizing and conceptualization in the work beyond mere technical excellence; the recognition of “standards” in non-productive practices such as shipping and labeling;

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 55.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 13-14.

and collaborative work with industry.²⁰⁶ While not all of these parameters were required at all times by all professional practitioners, Alföldy's review of emerging mid-century North American craft standards as productive on new identities within articulable standards is quite persuasive.

Elizabeth's work can be viewed in many ways as participant in several of these new professionalizing standards. Her advanced degree from the Munich Art Academy with its European cachet placed her inside the academic boundary; her innovative work in design and technique coupled with her work in bringing European folk traditions in color and technique to American attention; her preference for traditional wool yarns and structural innovation; and her work for industry all marked her as a recognizable modern professional craftswoman. This evaluation is validated by the historical record of Elizabeth's membership within the Wisconsin Designer Craftsman as it tightened its strictures on the highest levels of membership. Yet these professionalizing impulses were in sharp contrast with other of Elizabeth's understandings of knitting as a craft: her strictly utilitarian garment designs; the democratic nature of artistic craftsmanship, and her far more porous boundaries around the acquisition of the skills and practices of craftsmanship in knitting; and, finally, of her own productive elision between domesticity and professional design practice. Despite her own pursuit of these new professionalized membership categories, Elizabeth held her work firmly in the traditional utilitarian arena (with the one known exception of "Amos," her wall hanging), adhered to a more

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 9.

communitarian understanding of the artistic craftsman's identity, and felt no need to philosophically separate her domestic family life from her work.

Elizabeth's acceptance as a professional craftsman within the American Craft Council meaning was clear from her success with the Wisconsin Designer Craftsman detailed in the previous chapter. The WDC consistently acquired jurors from among various elite levels of the American Craft Council bureaucracy and notable ACC practitioners, and Elizabeth's utilitarian work was consistently accepted into exhibitions by them. Yet, Elizabeth's production of Amos in 1969 for the prestigious WDC Annual Exhibit, and juried in by Assistant Professor of Fine Arts Bud Stainaker, Indiana University-Bloomington, can be read as an impatient protest against the valorization of conceptualization over utilitarian aesthetics. Her decision to make a 'hanging' as her professional submission to the Wisconsin Designer Craftsman came late in the same year as *Objects USA*, "the most important exhibit of the decade" with twenty-two American exhibition sites and a European tour.²⁰⁷ Koplos and Metcalf's history of American studio craft cites this exhibit as "the cutting edge of craft" with regard to its emphasis on conceptualization over utilitarian values with "seventy-seven fiber pieces, the vast majority were wall hangings and only six were functional".²⁰⁸ Elizabeth's frustration at the downgrading of utilitarian technical excellence seems to have been significant at this point.

Yet Elizabeth's foundational philosophy of knitting stood at even greater odds with the emerging ethos of professional craftsmanship beyond the value for

²⁰⁷ Janet Koplos and Bruce Metcalf, *Makers: a History of American Studio Craft*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) 258.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

conceptualization. Elizabeth's ethos was built on the shared community of individual original knitters, not as keepers of specialized information but instead as sharers of this knowledge with any who wish to learn. Far from establishing strong boundaries around craftsmanship, Elizabeth's goal was to spread independent design and knowledgeable technique to anyone who would hold needles. This democracy of skill was fundamentally at odds with professionalism with its practices of exclusion and had more in common with the shared concerns and labors of the social knitting groups she found at Sophie Stefanski's Shorewood Yarn Shop, and with her ideals of shared knowledge and inspirations in artistic communities that were built upon a more communitarian model of craftsmanship.

Elizabeth's feelings in this matter are made clear throughout all her work in encouraging individual knitters to learn their craft more deeply and to make their own valuations about the suitability of materials and techniques in accomplishing their own goals. Though Alfoldy identifies the urge to differentiate between domesticity and professionalism as one of the driving forces for the ACC, Elizabeth seemed to feel no such exclusionary boundary between her life and her work, nor between ordinary knitters and their work. Her newsletters and publications exhibited an intimate connection with her domestic life. Her family needs and circumstances often drove specific designs but also with the simple exposure (in print and video) of her own designing and knitting within the most ordinary situations of family life. She relates countless examples of her knitting in ordinary life, from the designing of dozens of buttonholes while sitting on a park bench in Mons, Belgium, while Arnold was on business there in the summer of

1970²⁰⁹, or her relation of working out the original Aran cable pattern for *Vogue Knitting* in the summer of 1956, while on a family camping and fishing trip on the Mississippi river.²¹⁰ Elizabeth practiced her professionalism embedded within her family and fused her intellectual design work with domesticity in ways that shaped a kind of liberated and creative domesticity.

Elizabeth's easy and public segue between her professional work and her family life certainly did not weaken her interest in generating a strong community of knitting craftswomen, or her appreciation for a more democratic conceptualization of the artist based in a romantic tradition of the artist as part of a fluid community of shared work. This attitude towards communally generated and shared knowledge, and its part in a more communitarian conceptualization of art/craftsmanship, is made clear by Elizabeth's quotation of Emily Carr, the Canadian painter and writer (1871-1945), hand-copied by Elizabeth and pasted into her Scrapbook #2, dated August 1977. This quote, and the extended quote beyond her hand copied section, parallels Elizabeth's own work in bringing together a community of like-minded learning and sharing knitters. Elizabeth hand copied this section, in which Carr is describing her relationship to other artists who had been invited to see her work prepared for an exhibition. Carr contrasts the attitudes of two painters, Lee Nan and Max Maynard (the 'he' of the following quotation) in the context of her own sense of the value of shared insight. According to Carr, Lee, whose work received very limited exhibition due to anti-Chinese racism, was deeply sympathetic to Carr's work while the painter Maynard claimed that "women *can't* paint;

²⁰⁹ Elizabeth Zimmermann, *Knitters Almanac* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974; Dover Reprint 1981) 78-80.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

that faculty is the property of men only”.²¹¹ According to Carr, Maynard “tells me he only comes for what he can get out of me but he goes away disgruntled as if I’d stolen something from him. Sometimes I think I won’t ask him to come over any more but...” and it is at this point that Elizabeth’s copy begins:

“...if he can take anything out of my stuff (and he does use my ideas) maybe it’s my job to give out those ideas for him and for others to take and improve on and carry further. Don’t I hold that it is the work that matters and not who does it? If we give out what we get, more will be given to us. If we hoard, that which we have will stagnate instead of growing. Didn’t I see my way through Lawren? Didn’t I know, the first night I saw his stuff in his studio, that through it I could see further? I did not want to copy his work that (sic) I wanted to look out of the same window on to life and nature, to get beyond the surface as he did”—Emily Carr (“Hundreds and Thousands”)²¹²

The passage from Carr continues: “I think I can learn also through Lee Nan and Lee Nan thinks he can learn through me, light and life stretching out and intermingling, not bottled up and fermented.”²¹³ Carr’s insistence on artistic knowledge as to be shared and increased, across even the racialized and gendered boundaries of the early 20th century, and neither hoarded or ‘stolen’, resonated deeply with Elizabeth’s own sensibilities around the democracy of skill and artistic knowledge.²¹⁴

²¹¹ Emily Carr, *Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of Emily Carr*. (Toronto and Vancouver: Clarke, Irwin & Company, LTD. 1966) 63.

²¹² Emily Carr quotation, handcopied, and pasted into “Scrapbook #2, August 1977”. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville WI. Quotation located in Emily Carr, *Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of Emily Carr*. (Toronto and Vancouver: Clarke, Irwin & Company, LTD. 1966) 64.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ This reference to racialized and gendered boundaries is especially interesting in light of Elizabeth’s own long time friendship with George Nakashima. An American of Japanese descent interned at Camp Minidoka, Idaho (1942), Nakashima was sponsored by artist friends in New Hope, PA, allowing his release and removal to the east coast artists’ community, where he and his wife met Elizabeth and Arnold. Likewise, Elizabeth often corresponded with knitting men, and encouraged their work across the gendered boundary of the craft. These specific boundaries very much interested Elizabeth, and would merit further attention.

Elizabeth spoke eloquently of her own desire for the ‘intermingling’ of the shared community in 1971 in her unpublished manuscript while awaiting copies of her first book, *Knitting without Tears*. The passage begins in relating her being reminded by her ornithologist neighbor, Fran Hamerstrom, of a knitting trick Elizabeth had learned years prior from Barbara Abbey. Elizabeth began with those knitters she knew personally, but quickly expanded her vision:

It is my heart’s desire, that I imagine will remain but that, to gather together all the wonderful knitters I know for at least several days of knitting talk. Barbara Abbey, Peggy Chester, Dorothy Reade, Claire Keusch, Barbara Walker—what an elevating and erudite babble it would be. We should have to include Paula Simmons, who raises, shears, scours, cards, and spins her own wool, as well as all the intelligent and enquiring knitters known personally to us all, in my case starting with Martha Chace, Dorothy Case, Patty Smith, and going on for columns and columns of the names of those of you who knit for pleasure of the fingers and brain, who keep an open knitting mind, and do not hesitate to put things and theories to the test. We could tape the whole session, and have it available to knitters across the country, with all its argle-bargle, disagreement on whether to slip the first stitch and exclamations of ‘You’re PERFECTLY right; that’s what I’ve always said’ My word! What a heart’s desire, indeed.²¹⁵

By 1971, Elizabeth had been already thirteen years in generating her newsletters, had been exposed to national knitters through three television seasons, and had pursued multiple significant correspondences with both her fans and her textile peers. By 1971, Elizabeth had a clear sense of the community she had originally imagined as the other end of “Dear Knitter”, one that included any inquiring mind that enjoyed the ‘argle-bargle’ of connecting knitting practice to theory across various contexts. In 1971, Elizabeth had only three more years before being invited to teach a week long course in

²¹⁵ Elizabeth Zimmermann, “Lost Document: Tuesday, May 18th” [unpublished manuscript 1971]. 173. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

knitting at the University of Wisconsin continuing education program at Shell Lake, a camp which would develop into exactly the kind of gathering she envisioned above.

The following pages will examine these themes of liberated domesticity and democratic craftsmanship across Elizabeth's emerging public voice in her print and video work, the response to Elizabeth's early work exhibited in the fan mail collection at Schoolhouse Press, and the back stage work done by Elizabeth in generating this new community of knitters along a range of abilities and types of professionalism. This dialogic relationship, between 'Dear Knitter' and 'Dear Elizabeth' (between Elizabeth's hailing of her audience and their response) couched in the letters, books, and video media, shows most clearly the type of knitter and knitting community that Elizabeth was imagining, and what type was emerging in its relationship to her. It is important to note that the fan mail collection at Schoolhouse Press is an extraordinary archive of self-representation by a significant population of knitters across a broad cross section of geography, age, gender, and class, across a several decade period. It includes letters typed on academic letterhead; painfully printed in pencil on grade school lined newsprint; handwritten script on social notecards; and nearly all speak of the enormous sense of revelation, pleasure, and disruption experienced by knitters in their first experience of Elizabeth's vision for knitting. Admittedly, this is not an unmediated archive, as clearly these letters were selected for saving by Elizabeth, but it is just as clearly a significant archive for understanding the complexity of the dialogic relationship between domesticity

and craftsmanship that was emerging in this period, from the point of view of the men and women inhabiting that relationship.²¹⁶

3.1 Newsletters, Wool Gathering and Television

Elizabeth's *Newsletters* were her earliest attempts at direct communication with American knitters. They were an intriguing blend of domesticity and professional achievement, mixing family and professional news, innovative designs and techniques, and multiple varieties of domestic and international resources for knitters. Originally, the *Newsletters* had pattern leaflets enclosed with her newsy chat but, by the Fall 1960 mailing, she had combined them into "Newsletter and Leaflet #5" and it continued thus until she increased the size and price of her publication and renamed it *Wool Gathering* in 1969. Her first inclusions of her designs, while already discursive and verbose by industry standards, were to become the central feature of these semiannual newsletters, with multiple variations and suggestions for customization for the knitter, and couched within the friendly and chatty news that included family and nature news, resource sharing and some mentions of the offerings of her sales list. The *Newsletters* display quite readily both acknowledgement and pleasure in the cozy family situation and the intellectual rigor that Elizabeth expected out of her craftsmen.

²¹⁶ The archive of fanmail in examining self-representing women is receiving more notice in those scholars examining the professional writer-housewife of this period. Jessamyn Neuhaus "is It Ridiculous for me to Say I want to Write?" in the *Journal of Women's History* 21(2) 115-137, examines the fan mail sent to the housewife writer Shirley Jackson as indicative of women's attempts to "incorporate the domestic into a public career, thus using their proscribed social role to actually challenge and expand that role" (121) and in fact to transform their domesticity into agency and an independent voice.

The initial newsletters were a distinct publication from her patterns, as intimated in Elizabeth's narration quoted in Chapter 2. Originally, the designs were printed separately and included with her Newsletter to her customer list. Only one of these original mailings exists prior to their merging into a single publication. A single copy of *Newsletter #2*, Winter 1959-60 in the archives of Schoolhouse Press offers a sense of the original tone of Elizabeth's relationship with her "cussies."²¹⁷ Addressing her reader directly as "Dear Knitter," her tone was neighborly, friendly and knowledgeable in the extreme, blending a kind of 'over the back fence' sociability with multi lingual text book suggestions. Primarily occupied with bringing new yarn colors and her conventionally published designs for a Peruvian face mask, and her man's black and white sweater (both in *McCall's* Fall 1959 edition) to her reader's notice, she indulged further. In recommending her three-ply Sheepswool yarn, she encouraged the making of "incredibly snug cold weather socks" as "Men become restless when it's time for hunting, ice-fishing & other frigid sports. Why not let them be restless in comfort?"²¹⁸ She was clearly delighted at her European successes when she noted that "Our daughter in Europe has made many converts to circular knitting and cut sweaters. She was able to go up to several sweaters while skiing in Zermatt, & tell their startled owners that her mama had designed their chandail, Pulli, or what have you."²¹⁹ She also brought Catherine Clark, "famous Wisconsin baker of proper bread" to her customer's attention as "bringing out a

²¹⁷ This newsletter #2 was not included in the collected newsletters of *The Opinionated Knitter: Elizabeth Zimmermann Newsletters 1958-1968*, ed. by Meg Swansen and published by Schoolhouse Press in 2005. Found in the archives at Schoolhouse Press, it appears to be a more original type of 'Dear Knitter' prior to the inclusion of designs in the body of the Newsletter.

²¹⁸ Elizabeth Zimmermann, *Newsletter #2, Winter 1959-60*. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

²¹⁹ Ibid. The terms 'chandail' and 'Pulli' are idiosyncratic French for various weights of sweaters, though the term 'pulli' currently seems to refer to an American style sweatshirt, rather than a hand knit sweater.

new line of Christmas goodies. We love them, & perhaps you will too. I enclose details.” She also offered a brief set of hints on knitting techniques.

By 1960 the designs were the primary texts of the newsletters but Elizabeth’s cozy tone continued throughout with thoughts on the weather and family, and encouragement to her knitters to break free from the old highly detailed and specific patterns of the industry. With her Fall 1960 introduction of her new bulky yarn, “Sheepsdwn” and her presentation of four different sweater designs (and a watch cap design complete with her family’s varying opinions of it), Elizabeth also solicited intelligent response: “Well, there you have SHEEPSDOWN. Now you are on your own. Please let me know how you like it, if you have suggestions, or if you need help. I deliberately keep my knitting notes vague because tastes vary, and your brains are as good as mine anyway. But I have experience and am always glad to help with knotty problems if I can. For stitch-by-stitch direction, the stores are awash with ‘Books.’”²²⁰ This tone of equality between the designer and the knitter, and distaste for too specific directions was repeated throughout her newsletters.

In her spring 1962 “Newsletter & Leaflet #8” Elizabeth leads with weather and husband news: “Dear Knitter, The Wisconsin winter had been long & stubborn, but soon now we shall be listening for the geese. My husband is down by the river, ice-fishing, muffled to the gills in his watchcap and his old honourable sweater, his toes happy in Sheepswool socks. I hug the logging-stove, & work on this, the spring newsletter.” And ends with reminiscences:

²²⁰ Elizabeth Zimmermann, “Newsletter & Leaflet #5, Fall 1960” *The Opinionated Knitter*, (Marshfield WI: Schoolhouse Press. 2005.) 31.

Last summer's camping trip included portaging, so gear was reduced to a minimum. I took only six skeins of 'Homespun' & achieved six pairs of ribbed socks (60 sts on #3 needles), which are so far wearing very well. They were rewarding to work on, could be slipped into a pocket, & were snatched up to be worn as soon as completed. Canadian yarn, Canadian waters, & some ends left behind for Canadian mousenests. Sincerely, Elizabeth.²²¹

Family was again featured in her Fall 1968 "Newsletter and Leaflet #21" with the introduction of her Baby Surprise Jacket, one of her most enduring designs to this day, and driven by her family situation: "The best news is that I am about to join the happy gang of doating (sic) grandmas (hence the above design). From now on you may expect more baby designs from me, gradually increasing in age and size. (my husband says, like me). I have deliberately held off until I had a personal interest in this field, and results may well be surprising, to say the least."²²² Elizabeth's neighborly sharing of family news, and the family's central role in driving her work was clearly considered an advantage in her work and writing, and not to be excluded as unprofessional.

With #9, Fall 1962, Elizabeth continued in dialogue with her readers: "I don't like zippers in sweaters, but many recipients insist, so I give in, I find that washing (or blocking) garment and zipper separately before assembling helps with stretching and shrinking problems. I sew them in neatly, by hand, on the right side, muttering to myself."²²³ These friendly notes were the accompaniment to the main feature: a custom fit raglan sweater with optional pockets (later independently known as "Afterthought Pockets"), and also a textured garter-stitch afghan, and a book recommendation, *Tricot*

²²¹ Ibid., "Newsletter & Leaflet #8", 48-49.

²²² Ibid., "Newsletter & Leaflet #21", 103.

²²³ Ibid., "Newsletter & Leaflet #9", 53.

Enfants in “undiluted French” but with “exact diagrams” and excellent photography.²²⁴

Elizabeth’s comfortable tone segued easily between cozy reminiscence, neighborly news, friendly advice, and expectations of high levels of engaged craftsmanship on the part of her reader in her designs and book recommendations.

Her expectations of intelligent engagement were especially notable in the design directions, noted in her introduction to the Sheepswool yarns above. This shift in her style of knitting directions was significant in its assumptions about the knitter. While Elizabeth could certainly be very specific and directive in complex stitch and design necessities, she very much preferred to leave most of the customizing in fit, color and pattern up to the knitter, in stark contrast to the industry publications. Elizabeth offered a basic structure and left details to the knitter. Elizabeth’s narrative of the project usually included a great deal more description of the garment and its construction with supporting line drawings of her own. Her Fall 1961 (#7) Newsletter contained six sketches of the garment (the Tomten jacket) including an overall schematic of the body construction and details of arm and hood shaping and attachment to the body, and the mitered corners at the neck front edge. These drawings supported her text:

BODY: Cast on 112 sts. For total width of sweater. Work 10 ridges. (1 ridge= 2 rows.) To give a good shape to the back, work a ‘short ridge’ i.e. K 84, turn K 56, turn K to end of row. Rep. this every 10 ridges.

ARMHOLES: at 40 ridges, K 14 for R front, cast off 28 for R armhole, K 28 for back, cast off 28 for L armhole, K 14 for L front. Work each section separately for 28 ridges. Do not cast off.

COLLAR: Put all 56 stitches of front & back on one needle and work for 7 ridges. Cast off.

SLEEVES: From right side, pick up 56 sts. from the ridges of the sides of armholes. Work 14 ridges. Mark 3 centre sts. Decr. 1 st. each side

²²⁴ Ibid.

of the every 3rd row until 28 sts. remain, or to desired length for sleeves.
Cast off. Sew rest of armholes and sleeve.

That's it. Notice the multiples? 12, 56, 28, 14, 7? ²²⁵

Elizabeth went on to offer modifications for over the head hood, pockets, borders for cuff, sleeve tops, and mitred neck front corners, and an alternative cardigan style neckline. Her separate directions for 2 pockets across the front were:

POCKETS: first make 2 pieces 14 sts wide & 10 ridges long. After 14 ridges of body, K7, * put next 14 sts. on thread, K 1 piece onto R needle, K to within 21 sts of end of row, rep. from * When jacket is done, castoff sts. on thread (with another colour if you like). ²²⁶

Her remarks on sizing were flexible in the extreme for the knitter: “You can make 4 sizes from these directions by changing weight of yarn & needle-size (& and thus GAUGE) . By varying the cast-on sts. in multiples of 8, you can make any size you want in any yarn you please.”²²⁷ Elizabeth’s directions offered her readers not a single specific sweater but instead a sweater template that could be customized in a mathematically infinite number of ways. With four size variations, three head and neck options (hooded, collared, or cardigan neck), pockets or not-pocket, zippered or button front, and belted or not-belted, this sweater could be made in ninety-six unique structural variations. But it is the last line of the quote above that moves this sweater into real design autonomy. Elizabeth provided directions on how the knitter could make any choice of yarn desired. Despite her own status as yarn vendor, Elizabeth wanted her readers to make their own choices around yarn selection, and to be capable of manipulating their materials in order to meet their own needs and tastes. With 96 structural variations, and no restrictions in color and yarn

²²⁵ Elizabeth Zimmermann, “Newsletter and Leaflet #7, Fall 1961” *The Opinionated Knitter*, 42.

²²⁶ Ibid., 43.

²²⁷ Ibid.

type, the Tomten was capable of infinite variations at the discretion of the knitter.

Elizabeth offered a visual and text overview, with structural variations and possibilities but trusted her knitters to know what final sweater they actually wanted to knit.

Contrast this with the *Woman's Day* directions for the same jacket in their November 1963. A single photograph of a finished front view of the garment appeared, with pockets, buttons and a stand-up collar. Directions called for Coats and Clarks Red Heart Super Fingering yarn, and the garment size is a child's 2 (with 4-6) given in parenthesis (as was standard). These allowed for three unique sweaters from this set of directions. These directions give the pocket as part of the construction, instead of left to the knitter's choice:

BODY: With A, cast on 136 [147-160] sts. Work in garter st and inc 1 st at beg and end of every other row 13 [14-15] times. Continue on 162 [175-190] sts until piece measures 3 ¼ " [3 ½- 3 ¾"] from beg. **Pocket Placement: 1st row:** K 12 [13-14] sts, *drop A, attach C and with C, bind off next 17 [19-21] sts, break off C. With A, k across sts of one pocket lining*, then k across row to within last 29 [32-35], repeat from * to *; k last 12 [13-14] sts. Work even on 162 [175-190] sts until piece measure 7 ½ ; [8-8 ½"] from beg, ending with a wrong side row....²²⁸

These far more specific and abbreviated directions provided such a detailed and close range view of the garment, yet without any overview of the structure, or options for customization, that the knitter could knit exactly as told, or not knit much at all. Elizabeth offered choices to her knitters. In fact, she demanded they make those choices. This particular jacket, later known as the Tomten, remains one of Elizabeth's most enduring

²²⁸ "100 Christmas Gifts: Bavarian Jacket" *Woman's Day*, November 1963, 36.

designs, and a Google search for “Tomten Jacket Images” returns over 33,000 hits with a dizzying array of variations in color, style, size, weight, closure, and collar.²²⁹

Elizabeth’s expectations of her audience were clear: a friendly sociability combined with design decisions left up to the knitter, (decisions more typically written into the pattern directions.) Yet, Elizabeth did not leave her readers unsupported in their design efforts. The *Newsletter* did not provide the space knitters would need to learn all the design tricks possible but Elizabeth’s went beyond mere cheerleading to offer more significant support in the form of her book list. Elizabeth wanted knitters to recognize and master the wealth of knitting technique and information that existed outside of the current American publications. Elizabeth combined both social and domestic notes, with expectations and support for active design work among ordinary knitters with her drive to recognize knitting as an intelligent practice of creative and communal craftsmanship.

Elizabeth’s booklist was extensive, international, and multilingual, and was intended to form the resource section of the knitter’s library. Her earliest recommendation in the Winter 1959-60 mailing was *Norske Strikkemonstr* by Annichen Sibbern Bohn of Norway, in both English and Norwegian language editions, a “compendium of stocking, mitten and cap designs with a single “beautiful sweater...included”.²³⁰ She often carried non-English publications as she felt that experienced or adventurous knitters could puzzle out the patterns from images and charts. Her “Newsletter and Leaflet #19, Fall ‘67” included an extensive list and her rationale for such books:

²²⁹ Google search made June 6, 2015.

²³⁰ Elizabeth Zimmermann, *Newsletter #2, Winter 1959-60*, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

Why thumb hopelessly through the glossy, floppy, ‘Books’ for exactly the sweater you want? Start your own hard-cover knitting library, and yourself design what you have in mind. Many of the following are unobtainable in the US so you see I am continuing with my policy of selling only what is hard to find.²³¹

Her distaste for the standard American publications which focused on individual projects with little further scope for understanding design and technique was repeated and clear. Her list included the British knitting publications of Mary Thomas, James Norbury, and Gladys Thompson, as well as an English edition of Therese de Dillmont’s 1886 *Encyclopedia of Needlework*, described by Elizabeth as a “classic” of 788 pages and 1174 engravings. She carried the Sibbern-Bohn text still, in both English and Norwegian, but had also added the Austrian knit lace designer Marianne Kinzel (published in England). Her one American publication in 1967 was Barbara Abbey’s *101 Ways to Improve Your Knitting*. Elizabeth also provided titles on embroidery and needlework by Mary Thomas, and by Heinz-Edgar Kiewe (a textile “authority in Oxford”²³²) as sources for color patterning inspiration. Her next newsletter included

two excellent French books (floppy); the new ‘Tricots Enfants’ in French, put out by Jardin des Modes in Paris, and an English translation of their ‘Grammaire de Tricot’ called ‘Handbook for Better Knitting’, which contain many fine French finishing touches...also have the Scotch Wool Shop Knitting Book, now 25 years old, with directions for many classic and traditional garments for children and adults.²³³

Her list of was to form for the knitter the knowledge base of the craftsman who worked out innovative design and process by building on the knowledge of past masters.

Elizabeth believed that knitters should have all resources possible at their fingertips, not

²³¹ Elizabeth Zimmermann “Newsletter and Leaflet# 19, Fall ‘67” in *the Opinionated Knitter*. 94-95.

²³² Ibid., 94.

²³³ Ibid., 99.

merely the abbreviated and limited offerings of the industry publications, and she went to rather great lengths to locate and bring these works to her readers' attention, both in attempting to maintain significant books in print, and to make out-of-print books available to her customers through a lending library program.

Three series of letters exist that illustrate the length and breadth of Elizabeth's efforts to keep significant authors in view of the public, even as original printings sold out, and copyrights passed into obscurity and confusion. These include her work to recover Barbara Abbey's early work, and Virginia Bellamy-Woods single text *Number Knitting*, but the earliest and longest lasting, and the original driver of her lending library, was her correspondence with and about the British knitter and historian Gladys Thompson. Elizabeth wrote to her (January 13, 1957) praising Thompson's 1955 book *Patterns for Guernseys and Jerseys* and expressing again the fusion of her family and designing: "My mother sent me your Guernsey and Jersey Patterns over a year ago from England, and it has given me so much help and inspiration that now I feel I must write to you. I took it and some wool to the wilds of Ontario in the summer of 1956, and spent two delirious weeks on a rocky and uninhabited (except for us and our tent) island, wrapped in a Hudson Bay blanket, and working out every single one of your patterns.—the Irish ones, that is." The book had come to Elizabeth's attention too late to help her puzzle out *Vogue's* Aran but Elizabeth and Thompson corresponded for several years regarding appropriate yarns for cable knitting, and the advantages of circular knitting needles. In 1961, Elizabeth was announcing the book's out of print status to her

customers with the warning “Cherish yours & lend sparingly.”²³⁴ By the next spring, Elizabeth was offering a buy-back program for the title: “Gladys Thompson Round-up: If any of the hundreds who bought “Guernsey and Jersey Patterns” (now, alas, quite out of print) is not using this book, would she like to return it to me for the full \$4 refund? It will bring cheer to someone on a long, pitiful, and almost hopeless waiting-list.”²³⁵ May 16, 1964, Elizabeth wrote to Dover Publications, offering her “treasured copy” of Thompson’s 1955 book, requesting their consideration of an American printing and offering her assistance “with diagrams, or the altering of errata”. Dover seems to have approached Batsford, Thompsons’ English publisher, as a letter from Batsford (July 31, 1964) assured Elizabeth that Batsford was preparing a new publication with Thompson but that “Thompson is now elderly, and progress is slow.”²³⁶ This edition would not be completed until 1969.

Elizabeth was driven to desperate measures by the fall of 1967 and initiated her lending library with her “treasured extra copy” of the book.²³⁷ She set the fee at one dollar for the first two weeks, and “third and every subsequent week costs \$50, OK?”²³⁸ The inside cover to her lending library copy exhibits further her sense of trepidation in starting this venture. Her book plate explains the process further:

This volume comprises the Elizabeth Zimmermann Lending Library. Fee: \$1 for 2 weeks (not counting time in the mail), 3rd and all subsequent weeks, \$50 weekly. So return it promptly or I’ll have the sheriff after you. NOTE The book is absolutely unobtainable, so help me

²³⁴ Elizabeth Zimmermann “Newsletter and Leaflet #7 Fall 1961”, *Opinionated Knitter*. 43.

²³⁵ Ibid., “Newsletter and Leaflet #8, Spring 1962”, 49.

²³⁶ Gladys Thompson Correspondence Collection, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

²³⁷ “Newsletter and leaflet #19” *Opinionated Knitter*. 95.

²³⁸ Ibid.

lend it to as many knitters as possible, and also preserve my faith in the Honour System.²³⁹

Elizabeth's faith must have been preserved, as a typed note was taped to the inside cover with the comment: "This book was read and honourably returned in 1968 and 1969 by" with a list of nineteen names (though the last is handwritten in and dated 1983), with the final comment "Long live the Honour System".²⁴⁰ The last letter of Thompson to Elizabeth, dated June 16, 1969, contains the news that she had finished the 1969 publication and was quite pleased with how it turned out, despite her own fears of non-completion. Her handwriting is very spidery and elderly appearing in this handwritten note, which ends with "...but now, as you say, I can relax. I also will end affectionately as you have helped me to accomplish my job!" Dover did pick up this 1969 Batsford edition in a 1971 reprint edition of *Patterns for Guernseys, Jerseys, & Arans: Fisherman's Sweaters from the British Isles*, with a "Note to American Knitters" by Elizabeth Zimmermann explaining differences between British and American materials, terminology and usage. The final letter in this series is dated April 25, 1984 from Batsford to Elizabeth expressing no knowledge of any further books on fisherman's knitting Thompson may have had in progress. Elizabeth's handwritten note on this letter: "ANS: I wanted address of heirs and assigns" indicates that Elizabeth may have been looking for Thompson's notes or an incomplete manuscript but the series ends with this letter.²⁴¹

²³⁹ Zimmermann copy of Gladys Thompson, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Gladys Thompson Correspondence Collection, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

Virginia Woods Bellamy was another author who entered Elizabeth's lending library program and on whose behalf Elizabeth approached Dover in an effort to have a reprint edition published. A letter series in the collection at Schoolhouse Press, and an article clipping regarding Bellamy's technique saved in a 1978 scrapbook offers a glimpse into Elizabeth's appreciation for Bellamy's work in her 1955 book *Number Knitting: the New All-Way Stretch Method*. It is a little unclear at what point Elizabeth meets with Bellamy's work as the article "Number Knitting—A New Way with an Old Art" by Louise Llewellyn Jarecka, was pasted into a 1978 scrapbook but was originally published in the Winter 1950-51 issue of *Handweaver and Craftsman*. Elizabeth gives a little history herself in her draft letter, dated January 2, 1976. Addressed to a Mr. Cirker of Dover, Elizabeth related both the scarcity and the importance of Wood's text:

For several years I have been trying to find a copy of the enclosed book, which I know only from borrowing it and honourably not 'losing' it, but returning it to the Library. Then I had the brilliant idea of advertising for it in my own 'Wool Gathering', and lo! The result is a copy for me and a copy to send to you for your inspection, and possible approval and re-printing.

I have been unable to trace Mrs. Bellamy and don't know if she is still alive, but I think her ideas are most certainly still living, and deserve a new and larger audience. She has pinned down the theory of Garter Stitch...and added many new mathematical possibilities...It is really as much of a man's knitting book as a woman's. Her clothes—owing, I think to her idiosyncratic and thrifty preference for loose knitting ...have an antique charm. I find her models beautiful as the day.²⁴²

Dover's response to Elizabeth is unknown but the next letter in the collection is one of response to Elizabeth by Thea Wheelwright, editor for Bond Wheelwright Publishers, dated seven weeks later on February 23, 1976. Wheelwright had been engaged in

²⁴² Letter from Elizabeth to "Mr. Cirker" of Dover Reprints, dated Jan 1 and 2, 1976, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

publishing a book of Bellamy's poetry and wrote in response to Elizabeth's order for Bellamy's newly published book of poetry: "Thank you for your check for the book of poems by Virginia Bellamy...By this time you may know that Mrs. Bellamy died on January 31, and it is a great loss to all of us and I feel it with a particular keenness for I tried my best to have proofs ready for her to see them before she died...this was not to be."²⁴³ Bellamy's book of sixty-two poems *And the Evening and the Morning...* was published after her death in 1976. *Number Knitting*, Bellamy's text on knitting in garter stitch, was never re-printed by Dover and remains out of print currently. But Elizabeth did place her extra copy into her lending library in early 1977.²⁴⁴ She received a third copy in 1978 from another customer, and the Schoolhouse Press lending library was still lending out copies of the Bellamy text as late as the fall of 2002.²⁴⁵ Elizabeth may have owed a great deal to Bellamy's work on garter stitch as in her later years Elizabeth was very much enamored with garter stitch designs. In 1972, Elizabeth had proposed a garter-stitch-only book to Elinor Parker at Scribner's but was discouraged, though she continued to design for garter stitch throughout her career. A collection of her garter stitch designs was finally published in 2011, by Schoolhouse Press, as *Knit One, Knit All: Elizabeth Zimmermann's Garter Stitch Designs*.

Elizabeth would be writing to publishers again in 1982 and 1983, in an effort to have another American knitting writer and designer, Barbara Abbey, reprinted. Abbey first published her small text *101 Ways to Improve your Knitting* in 1948 under the

²⁴³ Letter from Thea Wheelwright to Elizabeth Zimmermann, Feb 23, 1976. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

²⁴⁴ Letter from Lynda Voris to Elizabeth Zimmermann, Feb 18, 1977. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

²⁴⁵ Letter from Carol Berkin to Meg Swansen, Sept 30, 2002. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

sponsorship of the notions manufacturing company “Susan Bates.” Abbey republished in 1969 under her own name as part of the “Susan Bates Presents” series. Elizabeth carried this small text of techniques in both hard and soft cover for as long as her stock held out. Elizabeth announced Abbey’s 1971 *Complete Book of Knitting* in the March 1972 *Wool Gathering*, but was grieved to announce Abbey’s death in the March 1974 issue, alongside Abbey’s publication of *Lace Knitting*. Elizabeth’s admiration for Abbey was abundant in her letters to Viking in her attempt to disentangle the reprint rights from the original contracts between Abbey, C J Bates (Susan Bates), and Viking Press Publishers. Her draft note to Viking, dated April 9, 1983:

It is most kind of you to go to the trouble of contacting C. J. Bates. Whether they realize it or not, this small booklet left its mark on the knitting public of the US, and demand for it continues at a steady if not hectic rate. I knew and loved Barbara, as I think you did, and would love to have the privilege of keeping her beloved first book available. We bought up all that Susan Bates had left a few years ago, and the pile is diminishing.²⁴⁶

The correspondence speaks of a convoluted sharing of rights across the various entities and the possibility that Bates Corporation might wish to re-publish the text under the original contract. Elizabeth and Viking were unable to obtain reprint rights and the small book remains out of print to this day.

Elizabeth’s service to her knitters did not just focus on the quality of her offerings to her customers but went much further. Her salutation of “Dear Knitter” was no mere marketing affectation but rather a marker for the sincerely dialogic function of her newsy, chatty, technically expert *Newsletters*. Her inclusion of notes regarding other writers,

²⁴⁶ Draft letter Elizabeth Zimmermann to “Mary”, dated April 9, 1983, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

knitters and organizations, and her direct address and response to her readers, can be viewed as a series of identifying practices in marking the members of this new democratic model of craft knitters. In effect, Elizabeth was offering a series of introductions across the various aspects of the community, identifying various practices, members and sources of information and material, while simultaneously dialoging with her readers with regard to their input on her own design practice. In the Spring of 1963, Elizabeth made her first mention of another textile vendor, the hand weaver Carol Brown of Putney, Vermont, but this practice would come to take up a full page in the later *Wool Gatherings*, and offered her readers an enhanced sense of their belonging to a community of innovative craftsmen. Elizabeth introduced her readers to Yardland Farms, (Newsletter #11, Fall 1963) as a source for handmade buttons, to Paula Simmons as a source for handspun yarns, (Newsletter #12, Spring 1964) and to an Alaskan knitting teacher, Mrs. Eloise Forrer, (Newsletter #14, Spring 1965) in need of yarn donations. In her Newsletter #16, Spring 1966, she repeats her mention of Carol Brown and adds the Schaal Yarn Co where “Mr. Schaal sews in sleeves in a marvelous fashion”, and the Yarn Depot, a California yarn shop which is “a woolly paradise for weavers and knitters.”²⁴⁷ These mentions of other sources of materials increased over time, and especially with the expansion of the 1969 Wool Gathering to become a kind of community bulletin board, exhibiting the breadth and reach of the emerging community.

Yet Elizabeth was not only directing and guiding her readers, she was also listening to them. In addition to that noted above in her acquiescence to the request for

²⁴⁷ Elizabeth Zimmermann, in *Opinionated Knitter*, 53, 59, 67, 77, 85.

directions on zipper installations, Elizabeth leaned on her readers for guidance on what they would like her to design: “Your mail asks for a V-necked sweater and classic Aran directions” (#12, 66), “IDEAS for the subject of next fall’s newsletter are invited.” (#14, 77) with the succeeding issue devoted to mittens “As you see, mittens won, hands down.” (#15, 80). She responded to what they wanted to hear about: “Here follow 8 unusual knitting techniques, not out of conceitedness but because many have suggested that I combine them in one newsletter. If I won’t’ write a book, that is; and I won’t.” (#16, 84). “Is there a demand for Nether Garments? Longies? Sweaters-from-the-waist-down? If so, I am about to fill it.” (#17, 88). In all these short, even throw-away lines, Elizabeth was acknowledging her readers’ influence and assistance in her own work. This was most definitely not the professional distance so desired by the American Craft Council or Ida Riley Duncan. Elizabeth was writing letters to her community and listening for their answers.

Elizabeth’s *Newsletters* had a mailing list of “well over a thousand” by its 1969 transition to the larger format of the *Wool Gathering* but it was by no means the only method of communication open to her, nor was it the farthest reaching. Television, as an avenue for teaching knitting, was to open up for Elizabeth in the early 1960s after a local television personality and fellow member of the Walrus Club, Beulah Donahue, invited Elizabeth on as a guest in her short morning show “for 12 Tuesdays” in the fall and winter of 1963-64.²⁴⁸ “The resulting reaction of their listeners almost staggered the correspondence department” and Elizabeth “approached the Milwaukee Educational TV

²⁴⁸ Ibid.. “Newsletter #12.” 67.

outfit” and suggested her own show.²⁴⁹ In the fall of 1965, she starred in *The Busy Knitter*, a series of ten 30-minute shows, black and white, which covered the construction of a seamless raglan pullover or cardigan, and in 1967, she completed the filming of a second series, *The Busy Knitter II*, “13 half hours in color about a Norwegian Drop-Shouldered Sweater.”²⁵⁰ Neither set of videos survived archival storage but Schoolhouse Press does retain a number of documents pertaining to Elizabeth’s television work, including her drafts of the “Study Guides” which were made available for sale to viewers upon request. The *Busy Knitter* series was shown across the country through public cable television over 200 times as per Elizabeth’s note in her *Wool Gathering* #13 of September 1975 and continued to play well up into the early nineteen eighties. With its heaviest airtime in the Midwest and Northeast states, Elizabeth was available in the south, including Florida, Alabama and Texas, the mountain west of Utah, Arizona, and the Dakotas, the west coast of California and Washington State, and in both Alaska and Hawaii. Her viewers were beginners, intermediate and expert knitters from across a very wide spectrum of class, gender, age, and educational background, and they wrote, often quite eloquently, about their passionate engagement with both Elizabeth as a personality and with her advocacy for self-directed intelligent knitting.

Despite the loss of the videos themselves, the archive at Schoolhouse Press contains several documents describing the production and the series itself, as well as a series of Elizabeth’s drafts to the full set of her original “Study Guides” to the program. These “Study Guides” could be ordered from the station by the viewer and provided a

²⁴⁹ Elizabeth Zimmermann, *Knitting Around*, edited by Meg Swansen, Pittsville WI: Schoolhouse Press, 1989) 176-7.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 177.

written record of Elizabeth's guidance in the project. A family letter, dated July 18, 1965, from Elizabeth to her grown children related a very busy schedule of production for the *Busy Knitter I* of 10 tapes recorded in four weeks. Elizabeth had "to ramble on all alone for 22 ½ to 23 ½ minutes three times through for rehearsal" in her direct-to-camera instruction. With the lesson completed, she would "totter across the studio, frequently entangled in my umbilical microphone, and converse for the remainder of the half hour"²⁵¹ with two student knitters who acted as audience participants in the knitting project, discussing their questions regarding the preceding lesson and the "progress and problems of each in knitting their sweater."²⁵² Elizabeth's audience and purpose was defined in her first appearance:

This series is addressed to the experienced knitter, to whom it may offer a few new ideas; to the beginner, whom it will endeavor to teach to knit, to purl, to cast on, to increase and to decrease; but chiefly to the medium-range knitter, to show her the pleasure and adventure of constructing an original and quite personal sweater. For knitting is above all a pleasant pastime, which should be enjoyed. The work is eminently portable, and may be worked on at odd moments in many unexpected places—at the beach, in a fishing-boat, or while waiting in a car. Being perfectly silent, it does not interrupt social intercourse. The finished product is warm, useful and beautiful and supplies a never-ending demand. So let us knit.²⁵³

And knit they did. Elizabeth covered the basics and more, including information on gauge variations, dye lot matching, swatching the sample, what to look for in the yarn shop and what questions to ask the shop keeper, how to make a center pull ball out of a skein, how to begin with a circular needle, how to recondition

²⁵¹ Letter from Elizabeth to "Lords and Ladies", Dated July 18, 1965, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville WI.

²⁵² "Memorandum "the Busy Knitter" (mimeograph copy), signature by Larry Long, July 2, 1965. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

²⁵³ Draft of Study Guide #1, *Busy Knitter* materials, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

raveled yarn, options for marking the beginning of a round, and for holding live stitches until needed, how to tighten up loose corner stitches and how to keep an increase line straight, how to knit short rows and make a hem, how to mark a center front line and cut it for a cardigan, how to weave the underarms and pick up the right number of stitches for the bands, how to add a pocket, how to place and make buttonholes on either garter or stockinette stitch, and finally how to darn in the loose ends, block the sweater (three different methods) and finally fold it appropriately for storage. These advice tips and small techniques were very rarely presented in the industry knitting publications but were critical for the successful design project. Elizabeth remarks on her indulgence in knitting technique in her closing remarks to Lesson Ten:

I have greatly enjoyed making this series—I hope you have a little enjoyed watching? –and almost the greatest gratification has been the writing of these knitting notes, full of divagations and sidetrackings, (sic) as they are. Knitting-instruction writers lead a sad life, hemmed in on all sides by abbreviations, eliminations, compressions and the need to use up as little space as possible. It has been a true pleasure to expand myself for once.²⁵⁴

This ‘expansion’ of Elizabeth’s beyond the standard knitting guidelines, and beyond even her *Newsletter* capacity, was significant and was met with enthusiasm from a wide variety of viewers across age, gender, class and skill levels.²⁵⁵ It is clear that the *Busy Knitter*, like the *Newsletters*, was another method

²⁵⁴ Draft of Study Guide #10, *Busy Knitter* Materials, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

²⁵⁵ The collection of fan mail in the collection of Schoolhouse Press is a treasure trove of the unmediated voices of knitters in speaking for themselves about their knitting lives. Nowhere else are knitters self-representing in this period and this archive represents an unprecedented look into the intimate lives of American knitters. It is worthy of a great deal more research.

by which Elizabeth could circumvent the industry paradigm and speak directly to American knitters.

This direct address through television generated an enthusiastic fan mail response from her viewers and the collection represents an enormously varied group of knitters. Many of the letters spoke of the extraordinary ability of Elizabeth and her knitting to disrupt and transform multiple areas of their lives from basic knitting to family and community relationships and into professional ambitions. Typed on professional letterheads, handwritten on private stationery, or painfully penciled onto lined elementary school paper, these letters exhibit a dizzying array of viewers, across a wide range of skill and class levels, and nearly all speak of varieties of disruption and transformation in their status quo caused by Elizabeth's presentation of knitting. Experts and beginners alike were taken to new levels of skill, and even non-knitting partners were fascinated, regular viewers.

Many writers spoke of disruptions in their family schedules around the programming of the knitting series. Its common dinner and news hour scheduling of the *Busy Knitter*, led to husbands and families waiting for a late dinner and missing the news in favor of the knitting show. In February of 1969, an expert knitter from Owings Mill, Maryland wrote:

I wouldn't miss it for anything—in fact, my poor patient husband has to wait for his supper on Tuesday nights so I can watch you from 6 to 6:30. He was stunned at first that I watched you so faithfully as he said, 'What could you POSSIBLY learn about knitting—you've been expert for years.' Well, it's true that I'm what might be called an 'expert knitter' and that I've sold many of my children's sweater designs...but you know as well as I do that there are always new tricks to learn and new ways of

doing things in the knitting line...So congratulations on your series...your program is answering a real need in the knitting world.²⁵⁶

A later scheduling time seemed to bring other problems as a letter from Glen View, Illinois in 1969 pointed out:

This letter is intended as fan mail...to say that a whole neighborhood of busy knitters enjoy creating and learning with Elizabeth Zimmermann via Channel 11...BUT WHY OH WHY did the program get scheduled at 11:30 P.M.??? this is an impossible hour for most of us, who are busy mothers on the 7:30 AM to 10:30 PM shift! We have tried taking turns 'night owling' but we are all left with partially completed sweaters, and gaps in instructions and understanding for finishing them...²⁵⁷

This letter, written on behalf of an informal cooperative of Illinois knitters, and forwarded from WTTV Chicago to the originating Milwaukee station, shows a level of disruption to schedule and family life, and an elasticity in domesticity and community as the neighborhood scheduled and strategized in their efforts to engage as productively as possible with Elizabeth's presentations.

Beyond the simple disruptions of schedule and community, other knitters spoke of more profound personal and intergenerational transformations. A knitter from South Dakota, watching on KSHE Rapid City spoke of a more intimate identity revolution with both personal and public ramifications. Mrs. Thomas Schwink finally overcame the "lifelong mental inability to learn to knit stemming from the condition of my being left-handed and having an extremely competent and efficient right-handed mother...who taught everyone in town, except her own left-handed daughter, to knit." Having "attained a degree of proficiency and speed", Schwink had completed two seamless pullovers

²⁵⁶ Mrs. Roy C Barker to Elizabeth Zimmermann, February 20, 1970. Schoolhouse Press Archive, Pittsville, WI.

²⁵⁷ Mrs. Byrd Dehinton "for the Group of Knitters", to WTTV Chicago, forwarded to WMVS-TV Milwaukee, June 19, 1969. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

before the close of the ten week series, with seven pairs of socks “filling in the time between lessons” and with plans for “a cardigan for my Mother for Mother’s Day” as soon as the series addressed the issue of “making the front edges.”²⁵⁸ This now extremely productive knitter was also “considering writing a book of left-handed instructions for knitting and crocheting and submitting it for publication” with full acknowledgement to Elizabeth. These lines regarding the personal transformation from non-knitting daughter to aspiring professional knit writer bespeak a profoundly shifting identity and the discovery of an individual agentic voice and were echoed in many other letters.

Another satisfying familial disruption was told by a fan from Binghamton, New York, who learned to knit from a great grandmother. The great-grandmother had “never used a pattern” but did not

live long enough to teach me and other family knitters were strictly pattern followers. Maybe it’s wrong but it gives me rather perverse pleasure to have my grandmother admire something I’ve made and ask for the pattern and have me sit down and write it out for her because there is no written pattern. I guess it’s not all that bad—it also pleases my grandmother.²⁵⁹

This reversal of the standard narrative of knitting as a domestic craft handed down the generations from older to younger is but one of many disruptions and transformations legible in the fan mail collection.

A similar transformation towards increased individual agency was relayed in a 1971 letter from Chicago, from an “occasional knitter” who had never before “strayed

²⁵⁸ Mrs. Thomas Schwink letter to Elizabeth Zimmermann, Feb 25, 1970, Schoolhouse Press Archive, Pittsville WI.

²⁵⁹ Margaret Boardman Letter to Elizabeth Zimmermann. N.d., Schoolhouse Press Archive, Pittsville, WI.

from the printed instructions” but whose viewing of Elizabeth’s methods had “opened a whole new world for me.”²⁶⁰

You showed us how to think and not to be afraid of using imagination. Now, when I use a pattern, I use it only as a suggestion and not as an absolute. Many times while reading instruction I find myself saying, ‘that’s silly, Mrs. Zimmermann wouldn’t do that!’ Sure enough, using what you taught me, I do reason a better way.²⁶¹

Mail from across the country came to Wisconsin as writer after writer spoke of new found independence in design, and personal expression over printed directions. Experts learned new techniques and beginners expanded their skills, and even the use of overtly feminist political language was common. Elizabeth was praised for assuming “a raised knitting consciousness which is flattering. My motto is recipes are for cowards, and this carries over into other endeavors”²⁶² while another writer expressed that “your books are like an assertiveness training class in knitting. I get less timid with each article I knit.”²⁶³ Elizabeth’s pleasure and satisfaction in this last remark was evident as she hand copied the comment into the inside cover of her large brown album “Fanmail #6, April 1984”.

Yet personal and familial changes were not the only ones afoot. Despite the periodicals’ clear demarcation around class (discussed in Chapter 1), Elizabeth’s attention to knitting as personal design and expression was eroding significant social boundaries on a somewhat more public level. Elizabeth received letters from across the class spectrum but a 1968 letter from Mrs. Budd Henry of Homer City Pennsylvania gives a startled retelling of meeting across class boundaries. Ruth Henry, a very busy

²⁶⁰ Susan Waldman to Elizabeth Zimmermann, Oct 6, 1971, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Helen Snyder to Elizabeth Zimmermann, n.d. circa 1979, Schoolhouse Press Archive, Pittsville, WI.

²⁶³ Susan Whiton to Elizabeth Zimmermann, hand copied into scrapbook “Fanmail #6, April 1984” Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

dairy farmer, had been following Elizabeth's program and was sorry it was ending, saying that there was little else worth watching on TV:

I thought maybe city women didn't care for that kind of show but much to my surprise I discovered that's just not so. As I was buying some yarn...a very well dressed lady standing near me said how lovely the new colors were. And as things go we talked & she said she was watching you on TV & just loved it. Before you could shoo the cat out of the cream jar three more lady's (sic) stopped to talk. I never saw any of these women before but there we stood talking like old friends, about your knitting class.²⁶⁴

The ordinary quality of Ruth Henry's experience in meeting other women over the nice colors of the new yarns should not blur the serious cultural work in social boundary crossing being done in this and many other instances. Individuals were meeting, socializing and working around new practices and social structures were shifting in response.

Elizabeth's *Newsletters*, emerging out of frustration and combining friendly domestic notes with rigorous craftsmanship, technical resources and community and personal news, could be somewhat chaotic in presenting an early coherent statement of her philosophy of knitting. The first such statement (after her first *Woman's Day* 1955 article) came in the Spring 1967 *Newsletter #18* with a note that a substantial uptick in the mailing list had occurred with a recent mention of Elizabeth in Peggy Chester's

Popular Needlework:

I had better explain my knitting viewpoint. I am sworn to make knitting pleasant, and to abolishing unpopular things such as purling, sewing up, and, when practicable, casting off. Thus I have evolved my own knitting method, and embody this in my semi-annual newsletters. I prefer natural unbleached wool. Having found sources for this, I am glad to retail it to those who share my tastes. To my mind knitting can be a craft, and I have been fortunate in being accepted by craft exhibits. So consider using my

²⁶⁴ Ruth Henry to Elizabeth Zimmermann, March 8, 1968. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

yarns, Take my designs as a starting-point only, and turn out your own works of art.²⁶⁵

This statement, still limited by the single sheet *Newsletter* layout, reiterated her often repeated statements that the individual knitter should be the final designer of her own unique work. This philosophy would be expanded with Elizabeth's transition to a larger format with multiple pages for the September 1969 issue, when her mailing list was "well over a thousand newsletters".²⁶⁶ Her hesitation to make an expensive change to the publication was met with such enthusiasm that "I am absolutely floored. If I had known this is what you wanted, I would have supplied it years ago, but I didn't trust my instincts, which favour (sic) explicit and wordy directions as opposed to the esoteric shorthand of conventional knitting books. Now I shall give my instinct their head, so prepare for great garrulity."²⁶⁷ Yet, her readers were to demand more, and despite her earlier refusal to consider writing a book herself, Elizabeth would be exploring the possibilities of book publishing, with encouragement, and an introduction from Barbara Walker to Elinor Parker, her own editor at Scribner's.

3.2 Knitting Without Tears (1971) and Elizabeth Zimmermann's Knitter's Almanac (1974)

It was in book form that Elizabeth was finally able to expand at leisure in her thoughts on knitting, and to display fully her conceptualization of knitters and knitting as self-determining craftsman pursuing practices of original making. Dedicated to Barbara

²⁶⁵ Elizabeth Zimmermann, "Newsletter #18, Spring '67" *The Opinionated Knitter*, 91.

²⁶⁶ Elizabeth Zimmermann, *Wool Gathering* #1, September 1969, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

Abbey and Barbara Walker “with affection and respect,”²⁶⁸ *Knitting without Tears: Basic Techniques and Easy-to-Follow Directions for Garments to Fit all Sizes* contained six chapters, a bibliography and an index. It offered both information on the process and practices of general knitting in the first two chapters, as well as directions for specific types of sweaters, hats, socks, mittens, scarves, skirts, and shawls in the later chapters, and Elizabeth integrated the individual patterns within the narrative of designing and problem solving, similar to the earlier *Newsletters* and *Wool Gatherings*. Elizabeth offered a long forty-six pages of technical information in her first chapter, “The Opinionated Knitter” (her preferred title for the book), as an explanation of “some of the ideas that come while designing knitted garments”²⁶⁹ and provided information on yarn and yarn structure, color matching, needle types and selection, fabric and texture, and right- and left-handed techniques for holding the yarn. She offered four methods for casting-on (beginning a project), four methods for casting-off, multiple variations for increasing and decreasing, several recommendations on methods for joining including grafting, (and using circular needles to avoid the need for ‘sewing up’ all together), and several ideas on the production of borders and buttonholes on sweaters. She expected her knitters to assume control of their work technically and materially. She insisted on reproving manufactures for their mistakes (knots in yarn), resisting consumer pressure to purchase unnecessary tools, and even, in a direct contrast to Ida Riley Duncan’s advice in *Knit to Fit* to professional shopkeepers, encourages those who must “economize” in their love of knitting to “make your sweaters with very fine wool and many stitches...Fine

²⁶⁸ Elizabeth Zimmermann, *Knitting without Tears* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971).

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 1.

knitting gives you many more hours of your favorite hobby before you have to sally forth and make another capital investment.”²⁷⁰ Elizabeth’s knitters were to be in charge of their work.

Yet, more than mere factual information, Elizabeth was modeling knitting and the knitter herself in the context of her practice. All of this technical information was embedded with a narrative that stressed knitting as an autonomous activity, freely chosen and pursued, as a series of exciting problem solving exercises, rather than as pattern following. She simultaneously claimed knitting as a personal “obsession”²⁷¹ while releasing other women from an unwanted practice of domesticity:

Let nobody say she can’t sew up a sweater—she just doesn’t want to. Reminds me of the infuriating remark, “I’ve always wanted to knit, but I just can’t. ‘Pish, my good woman, you can plan meals, can’t you? You can put your hair up? You can type, write fairly legibly, shuffle cards? All of these are more difficult than knitting. You just don’t want to knit, so why pretend that you do? It is not compulsory; take up something else.”²⁷²

By contextualizing knitting as an active choice in practice, Elizabeth was free to indulge in an orgy of techniques for those truly interested in the practice. She listed options and consistently insisted that the reader make her choices and “knit the way you prefer.”²⁷³ With regard to tools, the knitter should “try various kinds of needles”, keep a nice stock of small tools to suit their own purposes, convenience and pleasure, and be aware that she need not buy very much to be expert: “Really, all you need to become a good knitter are wool, needles, hands, and slightly below-average intelligence. Of course, superior

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 4.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 1.

²⁷² Ibid., 45.

²⁷³ Ibid., 17.

intelligence, such as yours and mine, is an advantage.”²⁷⁴ In designing the knitters should experiment and regard her own taste: “the right side is the side that looks best to *you*”²⁷⁵ with regard to casting on, and, “Try it out and see if you think it is worth it”²⁷⁶ with regard to various decrease and increase techniques, and “You’ll have to decide for yourself”²⁷⁷ in the matter of text orientation on hems. Elizabeth constantly threw the design and technical decisions back onto her reader after sharing a wide variety of possibilities.

Further, she gave knitting an aura of physical and intellectual adventure. Her metaphors and examples ranged from domesticity to wilderness adventure: washing a sweater was “akin to bathing a baby, and brings the same satisfaction of producing a clean, pretty, sweet-smelling creature—very rewarding.”²⁷⁸ Design was an activity pursued “on a desert island in the middle of an unpopulated lake in Ontario”²⁷⁹ and wool garments are so water resistant that “when dropped overboard it floats long enough to give you ample time to rescue it” and so snow resistant that “a particularly beautiful cap...[was] worn for two seasons by a dedicated ski-teacher in all manner of blizzards and dirty weather”.²⁸⁰ An aluminum # 6 needle could furnish “an excellent shear pin for an outboard motor. It once saved us seven miles of paddling.”²⁸¹ Subtle techniques in

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 10-11.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 22.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 27.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 35.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 3.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 32.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 2.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 8. Elizabeth goes on to bemoan the fact that she allowed the damaging use of the needle end, and had to spend several hours re-pointing the end on a rock before she could continue with her knitting. Adventure has its costs.

construction could be used to generate social capital among friends and exhibit the knitter's cleverness and creativity:

I like to use it [sewn casting-off] on enigmatic garments with which I try to puzzle other knitters: 'Guess how this was made.' The first thing they look for is where I cast off, and if they can't find it they are very often flummoxed.²⁸²

These were no mere fashion accessories but rather self-expressive practices in a wide ranging life that recognized domesticity, adventure and the social context of practice.

Even the process of knitting itself was one of impetuous beginnings and spontaneous design. In her discussion of purchasing appropriate amounts of wool: "Never start a project without sufficient wool to finish it. But on a rainy winter's night who can resist three or four skeins of wool, pleading to be made into a sweater? 'I'll go to the wool shop first thing in the morning, and match the wool.' Oh dear, Famous last words. Well, there are several remedies..."²⁸³ Impetuosity would present no unresolvable difficulties. In fact, spontaneity was the heart of her design process. In her discussion on adding pockets as desired to a finished garment:

Besides, what's the sense of planning ahead unless you have to? You spend so many hours knitting, your thoughts running in and out with your needles; how satisfying not to be committed to too many details in advance, and to be able to incorporate later some of the new ideas that come to you while you are doing the donkey work.²⁸⁴

A clearer, more direct, contrast to the heavily detailed and specific industry directions could hardly be imagined. 'Cast-on as inspired' and 'design as continual process' were Elizabeth's advice, even if at times, such extemporaneous knitting led to problems. For

²⁸² Ibid., 22.

²⁸³ Ibid., 4.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 38.

Elizabeth, such problems were merely a chance for cleverness and invention, and an opportunity for the knitter to “prove that you are the absolute boss of your knitting.”²⁸⁵

Elizabeth moved beyond mere advice and encouragement to a far more substantive and active modeling of problem solving in design. After thirty-one pages of technique and options, Elizabeth interrupted her discussion of possible border treatments with a relation of her design process, in first person direct address and with a sense of ‘real time’ problem solving. Abruptly moving from a technical discussion of the elasticity of various types of ribbing, the text dropped several lines and begins again:

These words are being written on a desert island in the middle of an unpopulated lake in Ontario. It is a sparkling clear day in early September, and I am working on a small experimental sweater-from-the-neck-down....Well; I have finished the sleeves, ending them with ribbing at the wrists and am approaching the lower end of the body on a hundred stitches. I am faced with still more ribbing, and a cast-off edge, which is hard to do neatly and elastically in ribbing. I am discouraged. Let us see if ruse and subterfuge will solve my problem.²⁸⁶

She had knit herself into a corner over how to end the sweater (the final border of the preceding discussion). Moreover, she was running out of yarn and must substitute a much different yarn. Elizabeth went on to describe what she “will” try in solving her design problem with color patterns, a much changed gauge, and switch from ribbing to garter stitch in the final border.

Let us turn the unavoidable to good advantage...I will blend...colors and textures...I will put in one purl round...I will decrease....and finish by casting off in purl. Just a minute while I do it.

It worked...Necessity is the mother of invention. It saddens me to think of all the things I may ‘invent’ too late to be included in this book.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 37.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 32.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 34.

This modeling of experimentation and design thinking around her problem with this lower border provided a working example of the kind of material and technical thinking that is the meat and drink of craftsmanship. Placed in the section on borders, this model of problem solving went beyond encouragement and technical information to provide a view of the actively designing mind, with problematic issues both materially and technically, yet moving the garment to a satisfactory finish. It was, in this researcher's experience, unique in knitting literature to this point.

Knitting as self-expression was paramount to Elizabeth in her insistence on knitter's choice in all things, but she did not stop at the subtle creativity of color and design. She also encouraged personal meaning legibly embedded into the garment. In her discussion on the value of hems on the lower garment edge, she provided a brief discussion on creating readable text in color patterning.

You may include any small pattern that appeals to you, in a different color, or the name of the recipient of your labors, or any motto, axiom, or family joke that seems appropriate. The letters of the alphabet are quite easily worked out on squared paper....Few names can fill the entire circumference....You may care to fill the space with stars or flowers....You'll have to decide for yourself which way up the legend should be—towards the wearer, or towards admiring friends—I've not yet made up my mind about it.²⁸⁸

This legible meaning of a shared family joke, a motto, a name, was both an intimate and a public statement by the knitter. This sense of self-expression, in subtle construction choices, in spontaneous design, or publicly legible as knitted in text, was the very opposite of the stitch-by-stitch pattern following knitter of the yarn industry publications.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 35.

Elizabeth's ideal knitter would be ready to proclaim along with Elizabeth "I am truly the boss of my knitting".²⁸⁹

Elizabeth's concern was overwhelmingly the pleasure, convenience and self-expression of her knitting readers. In her short "philosophy of knitting" she claimed "its main tenets are enjoyment and satisfaction, accompanied by thrift, inventiveness, an appearance of industry and, above all, resourcefulness. Resourcefulness is probably the key word."²⁹⁰ In her closing statement of her first chapter, Elizabeth listed the various templates for seamless sweaters to follow in the text and advised that her samples were merely averages:

...and which of us is truly average? ...you may wish to change the percentages a bit to suit your taste, or the shape of the wearer. Feel free. I shall have failed in my endeavor if you copy my designs too slavishly; they are intended only as a guide, so be your own designer. No two people knit alike, look alike, think alike; why should their projects be alike? Your sweater should be like your own favorite original recipes—like nobody else's on earth.

And a good thing too.²⁹¹

Elizabeth's reader was to consult her own purposes and taste in all aspects of the practice and product of knitting, to be knowledgeable in materials and techniques, and to become the boss of her own knitting.

Elizabeth's second book, *Elizabeth Zimmermann's Knitter's Almanac*, would focus on many of the same themes. Elizabeth had originally planned the *Almanac* as a much stronger conflation of domesticity and design, and had written 320 pages of new text while waiting for the publication of *Knitting without Tears*. In an August 1971 letter

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 42.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 44.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 46.

to Elinor Parker at Scribner's, Elizabeth described her new text as "a little daily something—might possibly be of interest **make another book**".²⁹² She went on: "I'm not sticking to knitting, ~~entirely~~ the seasons creep in, daily happenings, even an occasional queer way of cooking. **and naturally opinions galore**."²⁹³ Elinor was concerned that such a text would be difficult to market in the traditional genres, and responded: "I was charmed with most of what you have written but feel that perhaps it is a little too discursive...What disturbs me most, however, is just how we would market such a book---I can see book stores wondering under what section they should put it."²⁹⁴ Elizabeth agreed that it seemed to hang between "poetic observations about country life, or the mental and empirical gropings (sic) of designing" but still hoped to focus on her "observations around ~~a series of~~ **the working out** of specific garments" while including "glimpses of my life and circumstances" which had received "favorable" comments in her fan mail.²⁹⁵ Elizabeth was clearly concerned that her next book make an even stronger conflation between the individual life of the knitter as lived, and her designing work as an active craftsman. The published version of the *Knitter's Almanac* retained much of that conflation of life and craftsmanship.

Organized on a monthly calendar, Elizabeth's *Almanac* situated twelve projects around the calendar of the year with four sweaters, baby garments, blankets, mittens, hats, shawls, leggings, socks and Christmas "fiddle faddle"²⁹⁶ for tree decorations. Her

²⁹² Elizabeth Zimmermann to Elinor Parker, August 7, 1971. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Parker to Zimmermann, September 29, 1971. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

²⁹⁵ Zimmermann to Parker November 27, 1971. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

²⁹⁶ Zimmermann, *Knitter's Almanac* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974, reprint Dover, 1981). Table of Contents.

dedication made clear her goals of craftsmanship: “To the Unsure Knitter, To the Blind Follower, and to all those who do not yet know that they can design their own knitting, this book is encouragingly dedicated.”²⁹⁷ Her opening statement made equally clear her appreciation for the domestic social context of craft knitting:

Once upon a time there was an old woman who loved to knit. She lived with her Old Man in the middle of a woods in a curious one-room schoolhouse which was rather untidy, and full of wool.

Every so often as she sat knitting by the warm iron stove or under the dappled shade of the black birch, as the season might dictate, she would call out to her husband: ‘Darling, I have unvented (sic) something,’ and would then go on to fill his patient ears with enthusiastic but highly unintelligible and esoteric gabble about knitting.

At last one day he said, ‘Darling, you ought to write a book.’

‘Old Man,’ she said, ‘I think I will’.

So she did.

It was well received, but, although it contained much that was reasonable, and even new, it did not contain all the things she knew about knitting, nor any of those things she continued to ‘unvent’. So she wrote another book, and you hold it in your hands right now....²⁹⁸

Like *Knitting without Tears*, *Knitter’s Almanac* would focus on knitting techniques and information that encouraged originality in design but the inclusion of the autobiographical and domestic material was a much stronger vision of the craft knitter in her social and domestic context. In the *Almanac*, Elizabeth again and again exposed knitting as a puzzle shared among knitting friends and strangers, as part of family life and relationships, European travel, and wilderness adventures. She tells stories of designing and writing her books while “water camping in the Canadian north woods”,²⁹⁹ of napping under her knitting while Arnold watched the ski jumping competitions in

²⁹⁷ Ibid., dedication page.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., “January: An Aran Sweater” 1.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 85.

February³⁰⁰ and of her “heart’s desire” in being “snowed in” with its attendant chores of filling bird feeders and shoveling off a groaning roof.³⁰¹ She also continued to model her design process as a kind of real time problem solving exercise, offering a design experiment in May regarding “revolutionary” mittens³⁰² and interrupting her narrative on Christmas decorations in August to confess that her “heart is not really in the designing of Christmas trivia, because my brain is designing a sock heel” that would be more resistant to wear.³⁰³ She wrote that she could “design only by doing”³⁰⁴ and that “the more you do a thing, the more ways you find of doing it”³⁰⁵ and time after time, exposed her thinking and practices in designing in her project narratives. She modeled the actual work of craftsmanship, rather than the romantic ideal of inspired knitting:

Solution of the heel-strengthening problem could have been *inspiration*, but I doubt it; I am not the inspiration-prone type. I gnaw on problems, knitting and ripping and knitting and ripping. The project sometimes improves and sometimes worsens. I think this is called empiricism, and I enjoy its practice inordinately.³⁰⁶

This practice of original and innovative craftsmanship productively embedded into the domestic life of the calendar year offered a durable vision of a new knitting identity. Charting her alternative version from both the industrial paradigm of blind pattern following in the production of a commercially uniform product, and the modern professional craftsman of the Wisconsin Designer Craftsman (and Alföldy’s analysis),

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 22-25.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 184-5.

³⁰² Ibid., 54.

³⁰³ Ibid., 89.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 87.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 91.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 121.

Elizabeth was hailing to the ‘Dear Knitter’ of her Newsletters, to American knitters, and modeling a new American knitting identity.

CHAPTER 4. “‘DEAR ELIZABETH ...’: AMERICAN KNITTERS RESPOND”

The direct and intimate tone of address established by “Dear Knitter” in her *Newsletter* was reproduced in her video series and books (as well as her in person teaching). It was Elizabeth’s foray into the imaginative act of practical identity making, as a defiant re-making and re-imagining of the current options of professional craft with its dedication to exclusivity and anti-domesticity, and of the contemporary needlework industry model of highly directive, class-based consumer fashion production. Through her multiple modes of address in print, video and in-person, Elizabeth was engaging in what Mikhail Bakhtin (through Dorothy Holland and Jean Lave) described as ‘dialogism’, the continual address and response of individuals and communities in cultural foment, which generates and re-generates both stability and innovation in the identities and practices of individuals, communities and social structures moving through time. Yet, as innovative and individual as Elizabeth herself was, the cultural work of identity requires the dialogic response. This chapter will focus on that response, in further private fan mail, in the professional responses of book reviews, interviews and articles, and finally, in the durable institutionalization of those new identities in national periodical publications. This emerging identity of fiber craftsmanship in knitting can be examined in the private individual, the communal, and the public institutional level in these sources.

Yet, as is so often the case, innovations that resolve particular difficulties do not resolve all difficulties, and, in fact, merely generate new concerns and have unforeseen consequences. Elizabeth's imaginary of social and democratic professional design, coupled with the lingering effects of hand knitting as an overwhelmingly anonymous tradition in both industry and personal domestic practice, was to lead to significant and durable difficulties over the economic and social capital of intellectual ownership. Issues of copyright infringement were to bedevil the new knitters, and the generation of a contemporary history of knitting innovation and design, out of a previously anonymous tradition, was made difficult in an unevenly shifting fiber craft landscape. This tension around intellectual credit in design, with its ensuing financial and social ramifications, had both individual and communal expressions. Elizabeth herself attempted to grapple with the idea of intellectual credit by the use of the term "unvention."³⁰⁷ By her use of this term in describing her various and frequent discoveries of small technical innovations, Elizabeth hoped to both offer credit to the unnamed generations of knitters prior to her work, and to claim her own creativity in practical discovery. Communally, this tension can be found repeatedly in both the individual experience of Elizabeth's commentary in her scrapbooks, and in the letters to the editors, and the formal discussion "Forum" of *Knitters* between the Winter 1987 and Summer 1989 issues. This difficulty around design credit and ownership was, of course, vastly complicated by both the increasing empowerment of individual knitters (fostered to great extent by Elizabeth herself) to strike out with their newfound creativity as teachers, writers and designer

³⁰⁷ Elizabeth Zimmermann, *Knitter's Almanac* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974) 1.

themselves, and by the advent of the home computer and printer that facilitated original and professional teaching materials, fast copies of patterns and articles, and self-publishing. These newly independent and creative knitters, with new copy, scanning and printing technologies to hand, were yet relatively naïve on issues of intellectual ownership, despite good intentions, and were still working alongside an industry paradigm that often still left their intellectual contributions unrecognized. In fact, this period in knitting has much resonance with the early 2000 situation around intellectual ownership in online video mash-ups, with a newly video literate audience suddenly provided with widespread middle class access to video editing technology and the internet. Discussions over definitions and practices of originality, derivation, and transformative use remain problematic and these are an issue as yet unresolved in practice for ordinary cultural production in both venues.

4.1 Fan mail

The fan mail after the initial television series spoke of disruption and transformation on multiple levels but seemed most often experienced in family and communal settings and relationships with husbands taken aback and charmed, friends gathering for moral and technical support, grandmother-mother-daughter relationships re-worked, and social boundaries transgressed. The fan mail written by Elizabeth's book readers seemed to tell a slightly more private story of the disruption and transformation of identity. In the television series, Elizabeth was clearly interacting with a camera audience, and with her two student knitters. In contrast, the books seemed to invite a more interior process of self-making. With Elizabeth's modeling of her own mental

processes and practices around design and problem solving, the reader was invited into an interior mental space of innovation and practice. For whatever reason, the fan mail after the publication of *Knitting Without Tears* in 1971, exhibits a deepening and more personal sense of the same disruption and transformation of identity within these new knitters. The letters of this period, from the early seventies through the mid-eighties, illustrate both the relatively simple statements of transformation into knitting craftsmanship, and more profound statements of personal transformation beyond knitting itself, in the face of both intimate and social resistance. Of course, a simple expression of transformation may be descriptive of a profound experience. The interior identity work of cultural production practices is both profound and subtle, and articulations of these transformations may be more or less skilled or expressive, but the letters do provide clues to those personal transformations.

The term ‘clues’ should not imply difficult to find or understand. Elizabeth’s correspondents were, by and large, an articulate and direct bunch in describing their reactions and imaginings. Sandra McFadin wrote her gratitude for “transforming me from an insecure, mediocre knitter into an adventurous, confident and, hopefully, talented knitter” whose friends were casting “envious looks” towards the three well-fitting Tomten sweaters made for various children from 5 years to a “five-pound premature baby.”³⁰⁸ A much later note spoke of the profound impact of the discovery of Elizabeth’s work. While knitting and watching a 1993 television documentary of the Kennedy assassination, with its comment that “everyone remembers exactly where they were” at

³⁰⁸ Mrs. Sandra McFadin letter to Elizabeth Zimmermann, dated March 31, 1972. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

that time, it occurred to Deborah Curry that “I will never forget the moment I discovered Elizabeth Zimmermann *Knitter’s Almanac*” at an east side New York city bookshop in the early 1980s:

I was charmed by your delightful prose and common sense, and remember feeling as if I’d been let in on a terrific secret. I clutched the book to my chest and raced home, whereupon I devoured every word. I returned the next day to buy *Knitting Workshop* and *Knitting Without Tears* and felt like the beneficiary of a treasure trove as I hurried home to read them....I learned to knit at my mother’s knee, but it wasn’t until I discovered you that I was set free as a knitter. I want to thank you, Elizabeth, for your infinite wisdom, intelligence, talent and charm and for sharing it all with us.³⁰⁹

Curry remarked further that she used *Knitting Without Tears* as the textbook in her knitting classes and had given away multiple copies. Loaning out or borrowing copies often led to difficulties for the knitters. In a charming set of three letters found in the collection, an aunt, Mary Hattendorf, and her niece, Virginia Baldrige, engaged in a veritable custody dispute over Baldrige’s copy of *Knitting Without Tears* throughout much of 1972! Baldrige had introduced her aunt, an “accomplished” knitter, to the book in May, and the aunt refused to return the book until she received her own copy. Virginia was driven to find a copy at her local library, where “it is in and out constantly.”³¹⁰ Between the May borrowing and the Sept 18th letter, Mrs. Hattendorf had knit four ski sweaters and a seamless yoke sweater, as “I have grandsons you see” and a daughter, while Virginia Baldrige completed three from her library copy.³¹¹ Baldrige quotes her aunt’s family Christmas newsletter in a letter to Elizabeth late in December:

³⁰⁹ Deborah Curry Letter to Elizabeth Zimmermann, dated Move 26, 1993. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

³¹⁰ Baldrige and Hattendorf letter series, August 24, 1972, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

³¹¹ Ibid.

Thanks to you for putting me wise to the source of inspiration that Elizabeth Zimmerman (sic) has been and I'm sure will continue to be. I'm able now to create my own ideas of design and style. I recently made a sweater for my 13-year old grand-daughter. Using the seamless directions I made a cardigan and just five-row patterned stripes in it and two of the stripes I used her name 'Della Della'—she is crazy about it. Now Joan wants one with the same idea!³¹²

From evidence in the letters, Hattendorf knit at least six sweaters between May and December, with her niece's copy of *Knitting Without Tears*.

These two women clearly embodied the description of Zimmermann knitters as written by another fan mail writer, Elizabeth Wayand, who wrote to Elizabeth in July of 1972 to encourage the quick production of a second book.

To my mind you are a 'KNITTERS KNITTER'. A KNITTER (in capital letters) is completely devoted to yarn and needles, has little time for other hobbies, sees knitting in every design and doesn't hesitate to experiment. And, I might add, has very little patience with 'pattern books'. ...you are a breath of fresh air—after so many year (sic) of the 'blah' knitting books.³¹³

This description by Wayand echoes many of the letters, especially in the years after the publication of Elizabeth's books, in a growing recognition and articulation that to knit 'as Elizabeth does' is to be a profoundly different kind of knitter, differentiated from more traditional knitters and even from a previous identity as a knitter.

This sense of profound re-making of identity appeared in more than just the ordinary family and neighborhood knitting of McFadin, Curry, Baldrige, Hattendorf, Wayand and others like them. It was given an eloquent articulation by Theresa Inverso, a textile professional, in a 1993 set of documents that includes a note from Inverso to Meg

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Elizabeth Wayand letter to Elizabeth Zimmermann, July 15, 1972. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

Swansen, and a copy of an Inverso essay sent to Amy Yanagi, then editor of New York based Taunton Press' *Threads* Magazine. Yanagi had been puzzled about knitting, and had asked Inverso:

...if I wore mittens and did I know anyone who did. I was able to tell her that the whole Midwest wears mittens (New York doesn't know that). ...Then she asked why I knit—was it the process or the product?...Anyway, I've been thinking a lot about that question since she proposed it and I feel like writing an essay: 'Why I Knit' (like a high school assignment) but in thinking about it, do you want to know what the short answer is? If anyone asks me now, 'why do you knit?' I will be ready with this brief reply: 'Because of Elizabeth'...I bet there are 99 out of 100 other knitters who could answer with the same words.³¹⁴

The enclosed short essay, addressed to "Dear Amy," went further to relate the story of an accomplished, professional sewing expert, who had learned to knit from her mother but dropped knitting as a pre-teen in favor of sewing and crocheting afghans. She "couldn't imagine wanting to knit" in lieu of sewing. As an adult, Inverso "found a copy of *Knitting Without Tears* at a library book sale. I read it as if it were a novel—couldn't put it down! If (sic) felt as if I were being propelled into knitting and I wanted to understand everything Elizabeth was talking about in that book."³¹⁵ Using Elizabeth's text, and Barbara Walker's *Learn-to-Knit Afghan Book*, she found that "it was as if 'Knitting' had been waiting for 25 years for me to return to it"³¹⁶ She ordered the *Knitting Almanac* and "read that book from cover to cover, loving Elizabeth's common sense and organic approach to knitting -- and to life!" Elizabeth's techniques, those original techniques of the January 1955 *Woman's Day* article on Norwegian Sweaters, and her love of wool,

³¹⁴ Theresa Inverso letter to Meg Swansen, dated Nov 26, 1993, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

³¹⁵ Theresa Inverso essay/letter to Amy Yanagi, undated, unpaginated, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

profoundly shifted Theresa Inverso's relationship with knitting and to the imagined community of knitters:

Now when I knit with wool, I feel connected to a tradition, and to others who are knitting and who have knit over the centuries. I am intensely interested in the history of knitting and in the knitting of other cultures, as a result. Above all, Elizabeth teaches the knitter to think, to analyze and to change the printed pattern, even her own.³¹⁷

Inverso continued with her realization that her mother had knit one of Elizabeth's 1956 Bernat edited seamless yoke sweaters (the edited pattern which drove Elizabeth's original *Newsletter*), and her memory of "my mother remarking when she was knitting it, how much she enjoyed knitting the yoke in the round...I have since purchased yarns to knit that sweater and when I make it, one knitting circle will be complete." Inverso ended her essay:

Is it process or product? I like having warm feet in Winter, wearing socks which I designed and knit, but I don't think the two can be separated. A lot of knitting is what Elizabeth calls 'donkey work'—and she suggests a remedy for that: knit and read at the same time (easy, if you love both equally). The 'donkey work' time is also a good time to knit and breath, and before you know it, Knitting becomes Breathing, Breathing Knitting. Do I still crochet? No. Do I still sew patchwork? A little. I knit whenever I can, and even when I should be doing other things (another tip learned from Elizabeth). Knitting is my first love, thanks to Elizabeth.³¹⁸

Inverso's thoughtful articulation of her experience of Elizabeth's work is a profound telling of a re-oriented, re-invented identity as a professional craftswoman with durable affiliations to the craft industry and professional publishing. Yet it was a common experience detailed in the fan mail collection at Schoolhouse Press.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

These letters and essay spoke of the disruption and transformation of knitting while others spoke more about the bleed of knitting independence and self-reliance into other aspects of their life. An undated but probably early 1980s letter credited *Knitting without Tears* for the writer's ability "to create my first non-tragic sweaters, I'm a better person as well as a knitter from all the wit, wisdom and philosophy you crammed into that book."³¹⁹ Linda Carlson's January 1976 letter was more specific:

...this letter comes as thanks ...for your inspiration to a dormant attitude of mine that I, and not a pattern book, should direct the outcome of my knitting. ...I was taught to knit before I was taught to read or write, and children who knit, as in all things, must Follow Directions. Carrying this subservience over into adulthood, one continues to follow the pattern books through typographical errors, misprints, and all sorts of ill-conceived ideas, lest the garment self-destruct out of spite. I'm having much more fun now.³²⁰

Carlson's independence of mind was echoed in many letters, and sometimes against significant resistance and amidst major life upheavals. A Mrs. Crociata, a military spouse, pursued ski sweater knitting despite an unfavorable climate. Writing in 1974 that she had seen the *Busy Knitter* while stationed in Washington State, she had not been able to purchase *Knitting Without Tears* until stationed in Hawaii two years later. Yet she was then, still in Hawaii, "presently working on my fourth sweater. Hope we are stationed in a cold climate soon so they can see some use."³²¹ Elizabeth's knitters were determined.

Many wrote about how major life transitions were eased by Elizabeth's knitting philosophy that "properly practiced, knitting soothes the troubled spirit and it doesn't hurt the untroubled spirit either."³²² Donald Bobbitt, one of several men knitters/letter writers,

³¹⁹ Rebecca Pick to Elizabeth Zimmermann, undated. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

³²⁰ Linda Carlson to Elizabeth Zimmermann, January 15, 1976, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

³²¹ Crociata letter to Elizabeth Zimmermann, March 29, 1974. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

³²² Elizabeth Zimmermann, *Knitting Without Tears*, (New York: Scribners, 1971). 2.

wrote that he had discovered Elizabeth's knitting books and began knitting as a retirement activity and found it "the most enjoyable hobby this engineer ever had."³²³ A lengthy 1972 letter from a Mrs. James Ritchie related how her retirement from her life as an "active member of New York City's business world" to a housewife and caregiver's role in Minneapolis, Minnesota, was eased by the discovery of Elizabeth's independent minded design principles. Despite being a lifelong knitter, she found Elizabeth's "philosophy of knitting" and the "re-discovery of the therapeutic value of knitting" enormously helpful in smoothing the "transition from the challenges of an executive life to decisions no more monumental than what to have for dinner."³²⁴ Ritchie goes on to relate again the differentiation between herself as an Elizabethan knitter and more traditionally minded knitters in her newly settled Midwestern community:

Conformity seems to be the rule, namely 'follow the pattern precisely, never invent, never be imaginative, never, never, dare to design one's own, etc.' I seem to have surprised (shocked?) my local relatives with my 'courage' in adapting and inventing my own patterns. (note: I have been sorely tempted to incorporate my so-called ability to organize, promote, execute with their not inconsiderable talents—with the result of a sort of business enterprise, perhaps some day I will. ³²⁵

This identity as a thinking, critical knitter was clearly evident in her ordinary practice, in contrast to her local community and family. It is not known if Ritchie opened a knitting business but other letter writers certainly did. Brenda Lewis, despite learning to knit as a child from pamphlets, found a copy of *Knitting Without Tears* at her local library and:

...checked it out so many times the librarian finally ordered me a personal copy.... I learned a lot about knitting from it, but what I liked best was that it is encouraging and it helps me to enjoy knitting...Thanks to you I

³²³ Donald Bobbitt letter to Elizabeth Zimmermann, undated. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

³²⁴ Nikki Ritchie letter to Elizabeth Zimmermann, April 13, 1972. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

³²⁵ Ibid.

am now a free lance designer and I have sold over 50 designs to Coats & Clark, Caron Int., The *Workbasket*, and The House of White Birches. You have been the greatest influence in my life and I feel it is due to you that I am so happy and doing what I always dreamed of doing.³²⁶

The profound sense of liberation in more than just practical knitting is one of the key themes of many of these letters after the publication of *Knitting Without Tears*, continuing throughout the remaining period of the collection. A particularly amusing letter, undated and with no signature attached, bleeds the independent-minded Elizabeth's influence very far indeed. The letter writer related that she and her husband were long distance motorcycle riders: "We belong to the Honda Gold Wing Club and enjoy taking trips. Anyhow,. I encountered some opposition from friends and family about getting on 'one of those things' at my age. I now show them your comments about knitting while riding and that shut them up!!!"³²⁷ Elizabeth and Arnold were long time BMW riders, and Elizabeth had discovered that she could ride behind Arnold and knit socks behind his back, and had written about this in several places. According to Meg Swansen, her parents rode their BMWs well into their 80s. Independent and non-conformist, indeed.

The enormous treasure trove of the fan mail helps to excavate the influence of Elizabeth's work, and the dialogic response of those she addressed as "Dear Knitter". In the call and response of identity practices, Elizabeth's conceptualization of the new knitter, embedded in family, independent in design

³²⁶ Brenda Lewis to Elizabeth Zimmermann, April 25, 1989, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

³²⁷ Unsigned, undated typescript . Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

and construction, self-reliant and self-directive, found resonance in the extraordinary variety of ordinary knitters, and this resonance is made visible in their letters of response, gratitude and inquiry. Time and again, these letters exhibit the profound re-shaping of individual identity made possible by this turn in practice from pattern-following fashion reproduction towards the independent crafting of self-expressive knitwear as cultural production. These many individuals, speaking in the *heteroglossia* of Bakhtin's infinitely various voices of culture, were soon to be coalescing into the more public communities represented by the book reviewers, and eventually into durable institutions. Elizabeth's work, by the publication of her second book, *Knitter's Almanac*, was being noticed by reviewers and periodicals, and the conversation spread to include other public and institutional voices.

4.2 Book reviews and articles

While the archival collection at Schoolhouse Press documents Elizabeth's correspondence with her public from 1955, and the original *Woman's Day* article on Norwegian sweater construction, the first larger institutional public notice of her work (beyond local and regional newspaper coverage) only began to occur around the publication of her second book, *Knitter's Almanac*, in 1974, with the publication of various book reviews. The collection of clippings made by Elizabeth contains several local, and upper Midwest newspaper clippings, and one notable national columnist review regarding *Knitting Without Tears*, but no formal book reviews dated earlier than 1974. It does show a surprising breadth of notice taken by other publications, and seems

to fall into two groupings, a collection of book reviews in the mid-1970s, and a collection of periodical profiles and articles in the early 1980s. Some of the reviewers were to be expected through mainstream and emerging craft publishers while others show unexpected interest in Elizabeth from both international and countercultural institutions.

Elizabeth received plenty of local coverage in the early 1970s, with extensive interview- articles written in 1971 by both the *Milwaukee Journal* and the *Daily Tribune* (Wisconsin Rapids), a shorter 1973 article by the *Marshfield Herald News* (Marshfield, Wisconsin), and another lengthy *Milwaukee Journal* article in 1974. These provide a fair amount of information regarding Elizabeth and her work at this period. Elizabeth is quoted in 1971 regarding Barbara Walker's encouragement to write *Knitting without Tears*, including Walker's explicit recommendation directly to Scribner's to consider Elizabeth as a woman "with a book in her," the original writing having occurred during a Canadian water camping trip, and estimated her mailing list at about 2500.³²⁸ The *Daily Tribune* article of the same year quotes Elizabeth remarking that her earliest TV appearance, a series of very brief appearances on the Beulah Donahue Show in Milwaukee, resulted in over 600 letters to the network.³²⁹ A *Marshfield News Herald* article of January 17, 1973, covers both a local library exhibit of Elizabeth's sweaters and yarns, and her authorship past and future, while offering the information that over 13,000 copies of *Knitting Without Tears* had been sold in the scant two years since publication. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* weighed in again in December of 1974 with an extensive interview and review of *Knitter's Almanac*. This article related again how Elizabeth's

³²⁸ Sharon Baade, "Knitter's Hobby Becomes a Book" *Milwaukee Journal*, Tuesday June 29, 1971.

³²⁹ Marty Turnbull, "Babcock area resident is author of new knitting book" *Daily Tribune*, Wisconsin Rapids, Tuesday June 29, 1971.

family camping trips were highly productive knitting periods with the story of Elizabeth's working out of the original 1957 *Vogue Pattern Book* Aran design while camping beside the Mississippi river for a few weeks. These local articles offer a fair amount of insight and information into Elizabeth's work in this period.

Yet far more significant notice was being taken of Elizabeth at this time by the national columnist Celestine Sibley, based at the *Atlanta Constitution*. Sibley was a nationally prominent reporter, columnist, and editor who covered politics, crime, legislative, and culture issues between 1941 and the late 1990s.³³⁰ In her August 9, 1973, column, "Book Warms Knitter's Heart," Sibley reviews an advance paperback copy of *Knitting Without Tears* as productive of "better and happier knitters" and comments that "every blooming thing she says strikes a responsive chord in this all-thumbs knitter's heart."³³¹ This review seems to have been the earliest nationally published notice of Elizabeth's work. Sibley would go on to write on Elizabeth's work again in 1974 with a review of *Knitter's Almanac*, "New Knit Book Rates with First,"³³² and, in 1981, with "A Word or Two on Wool Gathering," an amusing relation of lost and found contact with Elizabeth and a review of the periodical.³³³ These columns were among the earliest and most prominent notices of Elizabeth's work in this period.

Other reviews followed. The *Newburyport News*, Massachusetts, wrote "Elizabeth Zimmermann's *Knitter's Almanac* is written with such good humor that it is

³³⁰ Kim Purcell. "Celestine Sibley (1914-1999)." *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. 13 August 2013. Web. Accessed Dec 3 2015.

³³¹ Celestine Sibley "Opinionated: Book Warms Knitter's Heart" *Atlanta Constitution*, August 9, 1973.

³³² Celestine Sibley, "New Knit Book Rates with First," *Atlanta Constitution*, Dec 19, 1974.

³³³ Celestine Sibley, "A Word or Two on 'Wool Gathering,'" *Atlanta Constitution*, March 31, 1981.

fun to read, even if you don't like to knit" and called her Aran sweaters "stunning."³³⁴ *The Library Journal*, February 15, 1975, included the *Knitters Almanac* under its Decorative Arts and Crafts section, but further mentioned the earlier *Knitting Without Tears*, the newsletters and her television productions as "a mixture of good ideas, common sense and wit" and her work as both "traditional" and "innovative" as well as "a charming picture of her life in rural Wisconsin."³³⁵ Another early 1975 review touched on the conflation of knitting and daily life. *Artisan Crafts* magazine called Elizabeth's second book "a far from ordinary craft book" with projects interwoven "along with her delightful comments about her own year and her adventures in knitting. Hard to say if this is a novel or a craft book..."³³⁶ *The Workbasket* published a *Knitting Without Tears* review in May of 1974, and remarked that it was "rich with gems of knitting knowledge" for both intermediate and highly skilled knitters.³³⁷ An undated review by Beverly Narkiewicz of *UpCountry*,³³⁸ discovered in the archive, covered *Knitting Without Tears* and the primary Elizabethan principles of circular knitting, the use of both hands, and the ability of the knitter herself to design as she wished. Narkiewicz related her own history of poor knitting before using Elizabeth's techniques to master "those beautiful two color Scandinavian patterns that look so complicated."³³⁹

³³⁴ "New Craft Books among Least Costly" *Newburyport News*, Dec 20, 1974.

³³⁵ Margaret Zeps (University of Houston Library), *Library Journal* "Decorative Arts and Crafts," Feb 15, 1975.

³³⁶ *Artisan Crafts* "Books", Jan 1975. Clipping in Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

³³⁷ *The Workbasket* May 1974. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

³³⁸ *UpCountry* is identified in World Cat as a monthly magazine supplement to daily newspapers and focusing on New England country life. OCLC #30015638

³³⁹ Beverly Narkiewicz, "Around Home" *UpCountry* undated clipping, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

Many of these reviews, particularly of *Knitter's Almanac*, remarked very favorably on the conflation between creative practice and ordinary life. Yet one review discovered in the archives was profoundly negative regarding that aspect. A clipping pasted by Elizabeth into one of her scrapbooks, and ornamented with red marker outlines and circling, gave an alternative understanding of the book by Goody L Soloman, for “the Creative Woman’s Library” section of the May 1975 *Woman’s World* magazine. Soloman was “turned...off” right away by what she deemed Elizabeth’s labored attempt to be “cute and whimsical” by including stories of her family life, and found Elizabeth’s narrative style of direction “unintelligible gabble.”³⁴⁰ Soloman went further to call it an expensive “frivolity” with only 12 patterns, and accused Elizabeth of “talking down” to her readers and “posing as Grandma who has all the answers and sometimes addressing us as ‘My dears.’”³⁴¹ That very tone that so offended Soloman, appeared to Sibley and many other reviewers as friendly, and affording of welcome glimpses into a warm creative, and productive, domestic-professional life.

These early reviews were enlarged and added to over the next decade with a notable uptick in coverage on Elizabeth in the early 1980s, and with a broader focus to the coverage. Elizabeth published her third book, *Elizabeth Zimmermann’s Knitting Workshop* in conjunction with a VHS video release, as the first publication of her own publishing house, Schoolhouse Press, and with a great deal of support from her daughter and son-in-law, Meg and Chris Swansen. The *Knitting Workshop* video was also offered

³⁴⁰ Goody L. Soloman, “The Creative Woman’s Library” *Woman’s World*, May 1975. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI. The designation of this review from *Woman’s World* comes from a handwritten note at the top of the clipping. It is not clear which periodical, out of several possibilities, from which it might have been clipped.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

to cable television as a third series but had much less success there due to what producers deemed low production values.³⁴² It was far more successful in private sales as the home video machine became popular and as yarn shops began to sponsor classes and group knitting meetings. The March 1986 issue of *Wool Gathering* listed twenty shops which were currently hosting *Knitting Workshop* groups, from Virginia to California, and Alaska, to New Mexico and New Hampshire.³⁴³ This third text, far more than the previous titles, was organized as a progression of lessons with a strong focus on increasingly complex construction from a simple introductory cap with color pattern knitting, across seamless yoke-sweaters, drop-shoulder sweaters, a variety of shoulder shapings, garter stitch shawls and jackets, lace shawls and finally to Arans, Guernsey's and Fair Isles in the last lesson. This straightforward pedagogical organization of the material was far more suited to individual or group class instructional work, rather than the simple private reading of the earlier titles. Elizabeth's fusion of domesticity was much understated in this text with little mention of her home life, though some images of family and home were included.

Coverage of Elizabeth (as collected at Schoolhouse Press) in this period of the early 1980s shifted to expanded combinations of feature articles, interviews, designer profiles, and text and designs by Elizabeth (and increasingly by Meg Swansen). The emergence of new specialty periodical publications dedicated to craft textiles provided expanded virtual meeting places for the emerging communities of Elizabethan knitters and fiber crafters. Yet, notice of this new discourse and identity was being taken beyond

³⁴² Conversation with Meg Swansen, at Schoolhouse Press, September 19, 2013, Pittsville, WI.

³⁴³ *Wool Gathering* # 34, March 1986. 10. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

the craft specialty magazines into both countercultural and deeply conservative locations.³⁴⁴

In January of 1982, the Interweave Press periodical *Handwoven* (then beginning its third year of publication) featured “Knit to Fit with Handspun,” a profile of and a design by Elizabeth, in their regular feature “Spinning Wheels” written “by Brucie Adams with Elizabeth Zimmermann.”³⁴⁵ Adams recommended Elizabeth’s publications for those spinners who could not find commercial patterns to work for their yarns: “There’s a problem though, in finding knitting patterns suitable for handspun yarn, since it doesn’t necessarily conform to the gauge of standard commercial knitting yarns....What to do? Obviously, learn to design your own pattern.”³⁴⁶ Adams used Elizabeth’s Epaulet Sweater, “not ... Elizabeth’s easiest sweater, but it is fun”³⁴⁷ and Elizabeth’s “Exposition” of the making of the sweater, published in the previous Fall 1981 issue *Wool Gathering*, to model the design process of using handspun yarn in an Elizabeth design. Adams also mentioned *Knitting Without Tears*, and *Knitter’s Almanac*, as well as *Wool Gathering*. Astonishingly, this issue of *Handwoven* also included a “survey report” on their readership which offers a fortuitous glimpse at their readership. Their survey of their readership showed 30% were between 25-34 years of age, with college degrees and employed full time, while 25% were 35-44 years of age, and 32%

³⁴⁴ The trajectory of new publishing in craft textiles that began in the 1980s remains an unstudied but promising area. Few of the periodicals or books are archived in libraries. The collection of materials at Schoolhouse Press offers tantalizing glimpses of multiple publications (some of which are still in publication but some of which seemed to be short lived) but is necessarily limited.

³⁴⁵ Brucie Adams and Elizabeth Zimmermann, “Spinning Wheels: Knit to Fit with Handspun” *Handwoven*, January 1982, 70-73.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

had pursued some post graduate studies. Finally, 29% were older than 55 and fully 53% of their readership also knit.³⁴⁸ This surprisingly young and educated group of knitting weavers was clearly a target audience for Elizabeth, as reflected in a copy of a letter from Elizabeth to Bruce Adams dated only weeks later, March 20, 1982, in the collection at Schoolhouse:

Reactions to your piece in HANDWOVEN continue to roll in---over 50 identifiable ones to date. I've truly never had so much reaction to anything anyone ever wrote about me. How can I thank you. The magazine must have an incredibly loyal and alert following, with many handknitters among them. I do think that thinking knitters should be encouraged to emerge from their secret hidey-holes; too long has their craft been considered the perquisite of---you will forgive the expression---women's magazines....I think your article makes a marvelous point---a coupla (sic) points: handspun is eminently suitable to garter stitch; garter-stitch is a lovely stitch, mathematically superior and the same on either side; spinners can design and execute their own artifacts, just the way other craftspeople do. Down from the soapbox.³⁴⁹

Note here again the strong correlation in identity between the 'thinking' craftsman and the "other craftspeople" who "design and execute their own artifacts." This echoes Elizabeth's efforts throughout the decades of the late fifties, sixties and seventies to have her knitting accepted as professional craftsmanship by the Wisconsin Designer Craftsman organization. Elizabeth's pleasure at her techniques being offered to and accepted by a growing body of serious textile artisans, outside of the standard 'women's magazines,' must have been intense indeed.

That same spring, another weaving periodical, *The Prairie Wool Companion*, by Golden Fleece Publications in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, featured a new design by

³⁴⁸ Jane Patrick, "Getting Acquainted: a Survey Report" *Handwoven*, January 1982, 16-19. All figures from pages 18-19.

³⁴⁹ Draft letter from Elizabeth to Bruce Adams, March 20th, 1982, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

Elizabeth and offered a profile. *The Prairie Wool Companion* was initially published in 1981 by Aaron and Benjamin Xenakis for less than a decade before re-inventing itself as *Weaver's*, which remained in circulation until 1999.³⁵⁰ The Xenakis family was to become a major supporter of Elizabeth throughout their publications but especially in their 1984 introduction of *Knitters* (a topic that will be explored at length below.) The April 1982 profile (in the second issue of the new magazine) named Elizabeth as a “protean talent” and “the greatest living knitting designer” with “the sort of dynamic personality and exuberant enthusiasm which can electrify a group of workshop participants or a television audience and send them off with the courage to wrestle with giants.”³⁵¹ Their encomium was accompanied by a heretofore unpublished design of Elizabeth’s named here as “The Egmont Sweater” but later renamed as the New Zealand Sweater.³⁵² While the earlier *Handwoven* article had included the traditional detailed directions for “blind followers,”³⁵³ the Xenakis publication refused to do so. “No information is given regarding sizes, gauges, amounts or such. This sweater can be made virtually any size or weight of yarn.”³⁵⁴ Clearly, expectations of thinking craftsmanship by all practitioners were powerful and, indeed, were modeled by the publication. The text was also careful in its attribution of credit. In Elizabeth’s text, she refers to David Xenakis’ method for incorporating short rows into the body of a sweater while

³⁵⁰ Information on this publishing history is sketchy at best, and pieced together as possible through the World Cat database. Further historical exploration of the craft textile publishing industry is crucial in determining the historical and cultural trajectories of these craft communities but it is an effort outside the scope of this dissertation.

³⁵¹ *The Prairie Wool Companion*, April 1982. Golden Fleece Publishing. 80.

³⁵² Egmont is the name for a mountainous region of New Zealand.

³⁵³ *Handwoven*, January 1982. Interweave Press. 71.

³⁵⁴ *The Prairie Wool Companion*, April 1982, Golden Fleece Publishing. 82.

ameliorating the small hole left by the turn of the short row: “I commend you to the wisdom of David, who rationalized and tamed this technique for not making holes where you turn. See inset.”³⁵⁵ The corresponding inset to the article, “Wrapping,” led with further recognition of knitting craftsmanship (and intellectual property): “I blush but must admit that I think I got the idea originally from Barbara Walker...I no longer remember if the procedure I use is the same as Mrs. Walker’s but on the chance that it is, my apologies to her: hers was undoubtedly more lucidly written.”³⁵⁶ This careful attention to the assignment of credit, and the recognition that many individual knitters were contributing important technical innovations to the craft was becoming more common. The Winter 82/83 issue of *Handmade*, out of Ashville, North Carolina, offered a similar homage to Elizabeth and included Meg Swansen in their “Designer Profile” biographical segment and its accompanying article summarizing Elizabeth’s innovations in design and practice.³⁵⁷ These articles in the new U.S. craft textile specialty publications exhibit the growing acceptance of Elizabeth’s ideas of original design and craftsmanship, and furthering her revolt against previous conceptualizations.

Revolt was very much on the mind of the countercultural movement of the period, and Elizabeth drew a fair share of attention from alternative publications. A January /February 1984 issue of *Mother Earth News* featured Elizabeth and Meg extensively. Their rationale for including craft, specifically knitting, in the publication was explained as “aside from the satisfaction of creating a beautiful garment, knitting offers you a chance to do it *better* for *less*” and to make useful otherwise wasted moments such as “a

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 81.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 82.

³⁵⁷ *Handmade*, Winter 1982/3 Asheville, North Carolina 2(4)104-108.

long boring town meeting, political speech, or other obligatory function.”³⁵⁸ The anonymous writer credited Elizabeth and Meg with a “campaign to revolutionize the way folks approach their knitting...advocates of circular needles, exciting yarns, and *thinking* knitting in which a craftsperson designs and knits a garment without a pattern.”³⁵⁹ While the article featured three hats, plus variations, by Meg, and Aran and garter stitch variations of Elizabeth’s mid-fifties design of a “Hand to Hand Sweater”, it is clearly the do-it-yourself, revolutionary, integrated life of domesticity, politics and art ethos of Elizabeth’s knitting that appealed to *Mother Earth News*.³⁶⁰

Elizabeth’s appeal to the counter cultural movement was demonstrated again by an undated (but after the 1981 *Knitter’s Workshop*) review of *Knitting Without Tears* that appeared in *Coevolution Quarterly*, a periodical launched in 1974 by Stewart Brand’s *Whole Earth Catalog*. The review by Susan Blackwell Ramsey focused tightly on the same revolutionary nature of Elizabeth’s work. Indignant and “beginning to resent” that knitting remained a “stepchild” in craft, Ramsey fantasized about an “underground movement” similar to “Ghandi’s spinning wheels” such that “across the country, men and women discover a soothing skill which is inexpensive, portable and, while capable of producing beautiful, useful, warm garments at its most basic level, still lends itself to great intricacy of color, texture, and design. I’m certain that such a movement’s patron

³⁵⁸ “A Gallery of Winter Craft Projects: a Mini-Manual” *Mother Earth News* #85, January February 1984. 37.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

³⁶⁰ Elizabeth and Meg’s relationship to the counterculture movement throughout the post war period is deeply intriguing. *Wool Gathering* frequently carried anti-war and pro-environmental sentiments that were sometimes costly to Schoolhouse Press in terms of their customer base. Perhaps another book, post dissertation?

saint would be Elizabeth Zimmermann.”³⁶¹ Ramsey, the 2011 Prairie Schooner Book Prize winner for Poetry, also claimed Elizabeth as “the only knitting writer funny enough to read for the pleasure of it.”³⁶² Elizabeth’s independent craftsmanship philosophy and her integrated identity of craftsmanship-as-life were both highly attractive to various aspects of the countercultural movement.

Yet revolution in knitting could also be attractive to some of the most conservative of mainstream voices. In June of 1984, Elizabeth received a letter from Susan Raven. Raven had recently discovered *Knitting without Tears* through a loan from Kaffe Fassett, an American knitting and needlework designer, and longtime correspondent with Elizabeth, resident in London, and had become a “fan.”³⁶³ But she was a ‘fan’ who was also an assistant editor to the *Sunday Times Magazine*, London, with plans for “a series on knitting” and was looking for permission to quote from published works, and for an interview and photography session in Wisconsin. She also queried Elizabeth regarding any other “famous American knitters” who could be included on an interview tour.³⁶⁴ Elizabeth’s response was enthusiastic, shipping copies of all her books, plus various issues of *Wool Gathering*, and, while apologizing for a lack of knowledge regarding famous knitters, did offer Betty Furness of NBC and the actress Jill St. John though she did remark that “I’ve no idea if Mrs. Ronald Reagan knits. (It might save her sanity, one imagines.)”³⁶⁵ The profile series did happen, titled “Born-Again Knitting”

³⁶¹ Susan Blackwell Ramsey, *Coevolution Quarterly*, undated, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Susan Raven to Elizabeth, June 8, 1984, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Elizabeth Zimmermann to Susan Raven draft letter, dated June 19, 1984, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

with an initial installment in the October 14, 1984, issue, which profiled Richard Rutt, the Bishop of Leicester, a famous knitter and knit historian, and Kaffe Fassett, the knit and needlework designer. The second installment occurred in the December 9, 1984, issue, and profiled Elizabeth Zimmermann as the designer and the English actress Geraldine James as the celebrity knitter. The series set out to portray contemporary knitting as more “creative, youthful and fun” in contrast to a heavily regimented past of pattern following.³⁶⁶ Elizabeth’s profile emphasized her domestic-professional fusion with images of Arnold and Elizabeth in their rural schoolhouse home, riding the BMW, and quoted extensively from her books. Again, the differentiation between the previous identity of knitters as pattern followers from the new style of creative craft knitters could not be more clear.

None of the knitters recommended by Elizabeth to Raven seem to have appeared in the *Sunday Times Magazine* series but Elizabeth had one celebrity of whom she was then unaware (though celebrity seems hardly appropriate). In July of 1985, Elizabeth received a letter from Peter Ralston, inquiring as to the purchase of video instructions as he wanted a birthday gift for Betsy Wyeth, (Mrs. Andrew Wyeth). Ralston wrote: “Betsy (Mrs. Andrew) Wyeth is a good friend who is a great admirer of yours. She spoke of your (sic) and your talents at great length to me one day and during that chat mentioned how very much she would like to get the videotapes of your show/classes.”³⁶⁷ No further correspondence was found in the collection at Schoolhouse but the later articles on

³⁶⁶ Susan Raven “Week One Born-Again Knitting: Everybody’s Doing It!” *Sunday Times Magazine* (London), October 14, 1984, 62.

³⁶⁷ Peter Ralston to Elizabeth Zimmermann Letter, July 3, 1985, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

Wyeth in *Life* in June of 1987, and March 1997 caused considerable pride at Schoolhouse as photographs of Andrew Wyeth in both articles show him wearing Betsy's knitting, two different versions of Elizabeth's New Zealand sweater. In fact, the copy of the 1997 article, "Face to Face: Wyeth at 80" mentions the sweater as part of casual conversation between Betsy and Andy in the kitchen: "They talk about the sweater he is wearing, a silver-grey turtleneck she knitted. 'I love this one,' he says. 'It's like armor on top.' She gazes at him. 'It goes well with your eyes,' she says. 'Your eyes are so blue today.'"³⁶⁸ Elizabeth was deeply gratified to find her principles of knitting craftsmanship given such coverage and praise in both her native land and by the some of the most elite members of the fine art world. Yet print coverage of her books and work were not to be the only, nor the most durable, of her legacies.

4.3 Periodical Publication

As gratifying to Elizabeth as the increasing coverage of her work must have been across the various publications, Elizabeth's "dear knitter" as an identity was to be given durability, not by the increase of her own fame, but rather by the institutionalization of her principles and the emergence of wider communities of knitting craftsmen and women. A critical point for the institutionalization of this new identity was reached in the early 80s with the publication of two new knitting periodicals and they provide a remarkably clear indication of the extent and durability of Elizabeth's influence. In 1982, Soho Publishing revived *Vogue Knitting*, closed in the late 60s, and, two years later, Golden Fleece Publications (which also published *Prairie Wool Companion*, and, later,

³⁶⁸ George Howe Colt, "Face to Face: Wyeth at 80" *Life Magazine*, March 1997. 74.

Weavers) introduced a brand new periodical, *Knitters* in 1984. These two new specialty publications exhibited the reception of Elizabeth's conceptualizations of knitting and knitters, and provided a durable location for the continuing dialogic of identity formation, driven by Elizabeth's imaginary of both individuals and communities, to take shape and evolve.

The initial issue of *Vogue*, published out of New York City, focused heavily on the older industry paradigm of elite fashion object production.³⁶⁹ It did include somewhat more technical information regarding the basic stitches and requirements of knitting with anonymous pages on proper gauge, blocking techniques, and an introduction to crochet. It also provided an overview of knitting machines. Yet, the magazine was focused on elite fashion with heavy coverage in both feature articles and advertisement of couture house names rather than individual knitting designers. The "Designer Exclusives" of the front cover were actually "Exclusive Designer Kits" for national brand name yarns (Bernat, Berroco, Reynolds, Tahki), with a heavy emphasis on couture designs such as Adrienne Vittadini, Joan Vass, Carol Horn, and Kansai Yamamoto for an elite, or aspirational, audience. Such kits took all decision out of the hands and mind of the knitter by providing all yarns and notions, along with the pattern. The magazine again prioritized high fashion photo shoots of the finished objects, with prominent mention of the yarn branding, and secondary mentions of the other garments worn by the model. The editorial board also used the old fashioned form of highly abbreviated, directive and detailed project directions that strictly adhered to dressmaking standards for flat and sewn pattern

³⁶⁹ *Vogue Knitting*, Premier Issue, SoHo Publishing, 1982.

piece production (relegated to small print in a back section). The projects heavily featured advertiser's name-brand yarns, provided little or no narrative instruction, and offered no guidance on variation or customization. The conflation of advertisers' pages and editorial copy was so complete that it was often difficult for the researcher to differentiate between the two. Advertisers were primarily national name brands with heavy east coast and couture fashion representations. The new *Vogue* took very seriously the "legacy"³⁷⁰ of the older *Vogue* and clearly imagined their reader in much the same vein. In fact their dedication to the reproduction of fashion, with little input by the knitter could not be more clearly expressed:

We selected these perfect and original designs. And we bought all the ingredients for you, so you can make them exactly as you see them on the following pages! Each of these special sweaters is available as a complete kit, containing not only the yarn and directions, but every button, inset or applique, too....We know that these special yarns, color combinations, textures and notions would be time-consuming for you to duplicate, so we packaged them in ready-to-knit kits ...³⁷¹

Like the older *Vogue*, the new *Vogue* knitters were to have no input on their knitting but instead were reduced to the reproduction of credentialed and authoritative statements of couture fashion.

By contrast, *Knitters*, two years later, offered a very different product in content and tone. Published by the next generation of the Xenakis family, it featured by-lined lengthy articles on history, techniques, design issues and problem solving, with book, yarn and knitting machine reviews. High fashion style photography was minimal and confined to the actual article/projects. Instead, images of process such as the line

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 37.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

drawings in the “School for Knitters” pages,³⁷² and portraits of the contributing authors/designers were more prominent. Like Elizabeth’s original *Newsletters*, at least part of the aim of the magazine was to introduce the community of knitters to each other and to make sure that intellectual and artistic contributions were acknowledged.

Directions for individual projects were embedded as narrative into the feature articles and connected to the designers and writers, with standard sized font, and left myriad choices in design to the actual knitter. Most projects offered multiple options, including both circular knitting and the traditional knit-flat and sewn construction. Deborah Newton’s six page article on designing a brocade stitch blouse offered a “Designer’s Notebook” of design possibilities that included variations of shaping and texture across a variety of yarn types, illustrating just a few of the possibilities for this type of garment. She also included a page of how to “adapt” a flat knit pattern for circular knitting.³⁷³ Discussion on which yarns were suitable for each project was sometimes lengthy and several options were usually listed.

The most obviously apparent difference between the two publications might be in the advertisers list. While *Vogue* relied almost exclusively on elite, national yarn brands, *Knitters* represented a much more diverse set of sources and products. The list of advertisers ranged widely across North America and included a startling variety of products from locally sourced and hand dyed yarns (Nebraska, Maine, Vermont, Ohio, New Mexico, Ontario), Dutch and New Zealand spinning wheels, and materials for organizing studios and sales, and many, many small studios and local yarn shops.

³⁷² *Knitters*. Premier Issue, Golden Fleece Publishing. 1984, 6-8.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 17-23.

Knitter's offered its readers widely varied sources of both materials and information and was designed to appeal far beyond the production of a fashion object. Not an elite or aspirational fashion publication, *Knitters* was far more clearly representing a very broad middle class of artisans, their multiple processes, products and materials, and, it intended to explore every aspect of craft knitting.

And, Elizabeth was clearly in the middle of it all with an interview, the initial installment on a regular column "The Opinionated Knitter," and several of her designs featured, including the "Gaffer's Gansey" (a man's cable knit Guernsey). Furthermore, many of the other contributors (Dorothy Camper, Lizbeth Upitis, and Deborah Newton) had been heavily influenced by Elizabeth either as friends and students at Knitting Camp or through her publications. Most explicit though, were the editorials by Elaine Rowley and Alexis Xenakis. Rowley related watching Elizabeth on her public television program and of being "stranded at the armholes" when the station did not air the final episodes until the following year.³⁷⁴ She promised never to so strand her readers. But co-editor Alexis Xenakis went much further with a genesis story worthy of extensive quotation:

KNITTERS has been a wonderful journey for all of us. We embarked on it last fall when the thought of the magazine first entered our minds, and we began it by visiting a converted schoolhouse in the Wisconsin woods.

We had often dreamed of being in this place. We had been wanting to visit its occupants—the gentle grandmotherly lady, and her husband, Arnold, the retired brewmaster—for a long time. We knew she spends her time baking bread from home-ground flour, doting on her children, grandchildren and cats, and sitting next to the woodburning stove knitting; that she has an extraordinary gift for producing knitted designs which have warmed, flattered, and been cherished by thousands of knitters and their loved ones; that she is possessed of a prose style so beguiling and

³⁷⁴ Elaine Rowley, "Letters", *Knitters*, Premier Issue, Winter 1984, 3.

persuasive that thousands of people have been taught to approach her ancient craft without fear, and with her own joy of accomplishment....

Soon after our meeting with Elizabeth and her kind acceptance to do a regular column, *KNITTERS* started taking shape. Within days, a wonderful group of knitters kindly agreed to become our contributing editors. The excitement built as Meg, Barbara, Julia, Dorothy, Lizbeth, Marcie and Deborah began discussing *KNITTERS* with Elaine and myself.

It is the work of these women that gives *KNITTERS* its rich texture. I would like to thank them for their support and genuine interest...this dream would not have been possible without them. Or without you, who were meant to share that magical afternoon with Elizabeth, and to join this wonderful journey.³⁷⁵

Xenakis' explicit crediting of Elizabeth as a driving principle in the genesis and organization of the publication, and of her promise to participate as the first commitment the editors sought could not be clearer. His final statement makes clear his certainty that Elizabeth's influence was one of the primary attractions in the magazine.

An extraordinary April 1985 *Village Voice* review by Linda Dyett makes the difference between the two publications clear:

Just when I was convinced that all glossy magazines...have reached a state of unprecedented idiocy and crass hype, along comes the premier issue of *Knitters*, which manages to be simultaneously intellectual (yes, I dare to use that term for a craft publication) and good-looking. The sweaters in it are stylish if not trendy, the instructions letter-perfect, the photography (critical in a knitting magazine) clear and inviting. Knitter's tone conveys love of the craft and concern for its practitioner.

Incredulously, I note that it's published in South Dakota. How, I askdid they put together such a lush publication in Sioux Falls? They answer with their own question, which nails my big city prejudices: How can a good magazine be produced in *New York*? It's much easier out there in the hinterlands...without tedious business luncheons and corporate gamesmanship—and I'd wager they're glad to be distanced from advertisers looking for editorial pandering. ...they are determined not to owe anyone, and I believe them. When they suggest a brand of yarn, it's clearly just a suggestion and they give reasons. (Current advertisers are small manufacturers and mail order retailers—interesting in themselves).

³⁷⁵ Ibid., Alexis Xenakis, 3.

It helps that...editorial staff is composed of dedicated experts who know whereof they speak.... "If you are an experienced knitter, you'll adore this magazine. If you're a novice, it will set you on a sensible course."³⁷⁶

The publication of *Knitters* marks a critical mass threshold of the new knitting identity and the widespread assumption of that identity by a wide cross section of practitioners. As the gathering place for that imagined community of Elizabethan knitters, the publication *Knitters* was impressive.

It clearly impressed *Vogue Knitting* as well. By the Spring-Summer 1985 issue, *Vogue Knitting* began to change its format and shuffle its editorial board, and took up *Knitter's* challenge with an expanded set of feature articles concerning both technique and innovative process, and recruited Elizabeth herself as a regular guest columnist. Elizabeth dithered a bit in her decision to work with *Vogue*, as their emphasis on haute couture had offended many in the fiber craftsman communities. The Madison Knitter's Guild, chaired at that point by Dorothy Camper, had invited Elizabeth to speak at their gathering, as they often did, and Elizabeth had mentioned the *Vogue* offer. A handwritten note from Dorothy Camper voiced the opinion of many: "I asked some friends from the knitter's guild what they would think if they saw an ad or article with your names on it in *Vogue Knitting* and they all agreed it would result in a negative image for you."³⁷⁷ Yet, according to Meg, Elizabeth reasoned that, instead of a slowly going bad apple in a contaminated barrel, she could instead be 'the cup of bleach in a load of dirty laundry' at *Vogue*. She was deeply flattered that the premier magazine of her early years was

³⁷⁶ Linda Dyett, *Village Voice*, April 1985, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

³⁷⁷ Dorothy Camper note (handwritten), Schoolhouse Archive, Pittsville, WI.

recognizing her achievements.³⁷⁸ Elizabeth's name appeared on a regular column, with increasing writing help from Meg Swansen,³⁷⁹ in both publications, until her retirement in 1989. *Vogue Knitting* remained an elite publication with strong connections to the New York fashion industry, an emphasis on beautiful photography in the finished authoritative couture object, and a national brand name advertising base, but its expansion in recognition of the knitting craftsman was ongoing and significant.

Elizabeth's imagined "dear knitter" of the early newsletters was recognized and making itself into a strong and durable presence by the end of her career. With the growth of the large and small fiber gatherings and publications, it was achieving an enduring institutionalization that would encompass multiple expressions and practices, surviving and developing far beyond any individual conceptualization of the knitter as craftsman. The note from Dorothy Camper even shows how the knitting community could disapprove of their originator's choices. The actual gatherings of Black Sheep Gathering in Oregon and the Maryland, New York, and New Mexico Sheep and Wool Festivals, the imagined community of the publications, and, eventually, of online social media sites, were to prove extraordinarily fertile grounds for the growth in artistic and intellectual curiosity of fiber artisans in their intersection with the contemporary cultural forces that accepted and encourage increasing female agency.

³⁷⁸ Interview with Meg Swansen, Schoolhouse Press, July 11, 2012.

³⁷⁹ Meg admits that this 'help' was increasingly outright ghost writing by this period as her mother's mental and physical stamina were sharply waning by the late middle and end of the 1980s.

4.4 Tensions in the new community

The emerging communities of knitters were enthusiastic in embracing new methods and presentations of information. Yet they were not without their tensions and problems and the ‘argle-bargle, so desired by Elizabeth, could take on serious and uncomfortable overtones. As they generated new structures of knitterly autonomy, and moved from an anonymous tradition towards a traceable history in design and publishing, they also created new forms of ownership in both social and economic capital. The credit for these innovations, and therefore, the ownership of that new capital, came often under dispute across an unevenly changing landscape. It is important to realize this as two related but distinct issues. In the immediate issue of economic capital ownership, conflict was inevitable as designers and writers sought payment for increasingly valuable services and products. Yet as an anonymous tradition sought to know its own innovators and generate an historical record of craftsmanship, the very idea of individual credit for invention and discovery in knitting technique was deeply problematic. Few knitters had any idea of the history of knitting, and academic histories are a blank with regard to individual non-fictional knitters. As American textile writers and designers of the nineteen-sixties and seventies, like Elizabeth, Barbara Walker, Barbara Abbey, Mary Walker Phillips, and Paula Simmons gained name recognition through early book publication, this name recognition could be turned to multiple advantages in teaching workshops, article and design sales, and contracts for further books. By the middle and late seventies, this name recognition began to broaden as the new local and regional gatherings, with their rapidly increasing appetites for workshop teachers, generated fiber

celebrities as major attractions and an increase in book publication regarding knitting occurred. In another 10 years, major new periodical publications and a major surge in book publication were increasing the name value of celebrity knitters with article and pattern publication leading to teaching gigs, book publication, video production, and the capital of celebrity status, from local to national and international levels.

Yet the immediate assignation of copyright and teaching fees were not the only issues. Of particular concern to Elizabeth was the generation of a traceable history of knitting. Her efforts in this balanced between the desire for her own recognition as an innovator, and with crediting those knitters known and unknowns which influenced her. Her own resolution involved the use of the invented word “unvented” to reference those techniques which she had discovered, but which she could not imagine to be originally her discovery across the long history of knitting. Elizabeth’s awareness of the preceding work of generations of knitters would not allow her to claim utter originality, in most cases of simple technique. While she certainly held firm to her originality in design and writing, Elizabeth was attentive to crediting the knitting generations before her, as she could, with technique and innovation in the knitting process.

The explosion of knitting in this period would cause the collision of multiple designers, publications and writers in their attempts to move knitting into a new paradigm. With each new leap forward in the community, the financial and social value of knitting name recognition increased, and was doing so in a community that had little common understanding of basic intellectual ownership issues, and little or no knowledge of its own history of designers and innovators.

In the older model, designers had sold designs and remained largely anonymous to the knitting public. Ordinary knitters knit without much financial recompense for their labor, knitting either for family or for charity, and usually acquired the craft from anonymous publications or family sources. Occasional or even professional knitting for payment tended to be poorly recompensed and informally arranged, with the rules for social interaction often taking precedent over business negotiation. Remember that Elizabeth herself agreed to work for *Vogue Knitting* having puzzled out the original 1957 Aran sweater design over several weeks, and submitted the completed work without any discussion ever taking place regarding her payment. Design sales contracts between designers and either manufacturers or periodicals tended to be 'work for hire,' which assigned all rights to the purchaser with no copyright interest left for the designer, though this was changing by the late nineteen-eighties.³⁸⁰ Clearly, this situation applied to Elizabeth's 1957 Seamless Yoke Sweater design. Sold to Bernat and heavily re-written by their editors, Elizabeth had no recourse beyond re-designing and publishing the design herself. She could not force a Bernat retraction over the mismatch between her model and their directions.³⁸¹ For Bernat, and the rest of the knitting yarn industry, the goal of knitting designs was to drive yarn sales and the origins of good design could be largely irrelevant to the yarn producers.

³⁸⁰ Norma Ellman, "Letters from Readers: Bench Notes" *Knitters*, #16 Fall 1989, Golden Fleece Publications, p. 3.

³⁸¹ It is fascinating that Elizabeth could put up with a lack of clarity regarding an appropriate fee for her labor for *Vogue Knitting*, yet Bernat's re-writing of her design was outrageous. Elizabeth seems to have been far more interested in the reputation of her work, and in her own social capital, than she was in economic capital.

One such example of this twentieth century carelessness towards design credit on the part of the yarn industry, and the consternation caused by this carelessness to knitters, is the history of the Square Neck Pretzel Sweater as it is told in *Knitters* in 1989. Clearly the popular sweater of the year, Meg Swansen remarks, in an article in the Spring 1989 *Knitter's*, that it had enjoyed enormous popularity the previous year at Knitting Camp, but that no-one, even among that prestigious group of designing and writing knitters, seemed to know where this design had come from or who the original designer was.³⁸² The next issue of *Knitter's* contained a letter to the editor from Leisure Arts Publications which claims a 1988 publication of the design but with no claim to originality in that design.³⁸³ In fact, Leisure Arts makes no claim at all for where the design came from, merely that they had republished it in brochure form.

The final statement on the sweater comes in the Winter 1989 issue with a letter from a Tahki Imports yarn representative, Chris Hyland. He wrote of picking up the design from a yarn shop on his travels, copying it and passing it around to all the knitters and shops on his circuit. In his meeting with Yarn Loft owner Cheri Brown, he pulled the design from his bag and offered it to her in great excitement. He was rightfully horrified and deeply embarrassed at her response in claimant as the original designer. It had been lifted from her by other sales representatives.³⁸⁴ One of the most popular designs of the year had been stolen by yarn sales representatives. This was clearly a fairly common practice in the industry, and exemplifies the lack of acknowledgement to or value for designers. In the earlier period, this thievery would have cost the designer merely the

³⁸² Meg Swansen, "Forum: Give me a Break!", *Knitters* Spring 1989. 62.

³⁸³ "Letters" *Knitter's*, Summer 1989. 3.

³⁸⁴ "Letters: Chris Hyland" *Knitters*, Winter 1989. 4-5.

design fee of perhaps \$150. In this later period, the loss would have been significant, and may have amounted to several thousands of dollars in lost opportunities for article and pattern publication, and in teaching gigs. It is certainly possible that as an already busy shop owner, Cheri Brown was less interested in capitalizing as a designer but others would have registered this as a significant loss. There is no information on what further recompense was offered to the designer, beyond Chris Hyland's own letter insuring that proper credit, as he knew it, was assigned to Cheri Brown.

This single incident of a stolen design is but one of multiple examples of confusion around intellectual ownership which appear in the records both in Elizabeth's own archives at Schoolhouse Press and in the issues of *Knitter's Magazine*. The new financial and social values accruing to knitting expertise were often difficult to assign appropriately, emerging as they did out of a largely anonymous and durable craft practice with a strong history of community and family sharing. Elizabeth's own papers show a number of queries around third party use of her techniques, designs and text that show a fair amount of confusion around the issue of copyright. Elizabeth herself was conflicted around this issue, both idealistic in her admiration for the free sharing of information but also expressing private consternation when credit (either financial or social) was denied her, and sometimes taking steps to limit her losses, and/or, insist on her due.

Yet beyond the legal and financial ramifications of copyright and other forms of legal intellectual ownership, Elizabeth also struggled personally with the issue of appropriate accreditation of innovation in a heretofore anonymous community. Her eventual resolution to this issue was the use of an invented word on her part to refer to various techniques in her repertoire which she developed for herself but which she could

not imagine had not been already discovered by previous generations of knitters.

Elizabeth never used the term about her garment designs, but did use it freely about techniques of knitting. These various levels of ownership in social and economic capital, spanning interest in the generation of historical continuity; the assignation of copyright in published material despite confusion around copyright as applied to knitting processes; and the inability to achieve a common definition of originality in design, led to widespread confusion in intellectual ownership. History, copyright, patent, and plagiarism were all observed, transgressed, and confused as the new community struggled to come to terms with the new value it was generating for itself.

The evidence in the archive for this state of confusion is extensive. It can be seen in small queries around use and re-use of printed materials for teaching, and in confusion between copyright, plagiarism, the patent process, and the invention, and re-invention, of specific techniques or individual stitches. There are multiple examples of individuals attempting to work out their confusion, and a few of individuals clearly attempting to avoid copyright payment in ways that border on unethical. Complete designs for garments were another point of confusion, as older disregard for designers remained prevalent, and, as new designer recognition outpaced either editorial knowledge of the field or any agreement on the crucial points in the continuum between original, derivation, or transformation into a ‘new’ original.³⁸⁵ Finally, beyond even confusion

³⁸⁵ This language of ‘original work’, ‘derivational work’ and ‘transformational work’ is taken from that used by our current examinations of intellectual ownership in cultural production in the age of the internet and YouTube. The similarity in confusion around the ownership of cultural production in the two periods is striking. An excellent source for current thinking on intellectual ownership can be found online at the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, George Mason University, www.chnm.gmu.edu/tag/digital-humanities.

over single garment designs, there was tension over book publications and descriptions, and the reputations of designers and writers as leaders in the field. In most of these instances, it is clear that individuals were merely attempting to make their way amidst a mass of confusion in a dramatically changing paradigm that had yet found no real communal consensus on a fair or stable resolution of the issue.

Elizabeth herself claimed consistent copyright on her newsletters after the # 6 Spring 1961 issue with the notice “All rights reserved. If you wish to quote, ask me.”³⁸⁶ And many did ask permission. Some even offered payment. Mrs. L. A. Drakenberg wrote to Elizabeth in September of 1982, requesting information on how to reimburse Elizabeth for copies of Elizabeth’s New Zealand Sweater pattern (published by Schoolhouse Press) in teaching a class:

I would like to teach it from your “Spun Out” and while I will not charge the students for the instructions, I feel you should be remunerated for each copy used since the design and instruction are YOURS. You wouldn’t need to mail any to me requiring postage expense; if you will approve it, I will photocopy them and then pay you for the number we use (from 8 to 12). Since the copy I have was a gift from you, I do not know the ‘cost, per.’³⁸⁷

Elizabeth hand wrote a note to Drakenberg’s query in the scrapbook: “Noble Suggestion” though there is no further record of their arrangement.³⁸⁸ These queries for guidance in using Elizabeth’s materials were common, but also common were queries of a less clear cut nature.

³⁸⁶ Elizabeth Zimmermann, “Leaflet #6” *The Opinionated Knitter*, (Pittsville, WI: Schoolhouse Press, 2005) 37.

³⁸⁷ Mrs. L. A. Drakenberg to Elizabeth Zimmermann, September 13, 1982. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

³⁸⁸ Ibid. Note that “Spun Out” was the title of a pamphlet publication that offered the feature pattern only of a past issue of the *Newsletter*, or *Wool Gathering*. These could be ordered from Schoolhouse Press separately from back issues of the periodicals.

One of the points of confusion was the difference between a technique and the description of that technique. Linda Carlson, a designer whose notes to Elizabeth were frequently pasted into her scrapbooks, took up this issue in her undated note concerning crediting Elizabeth appropriately for the technique and directions for knitting a three-stitch knitted cord. Carlson had designed a simple Christmas ornament using this cording and inquired:

But my immediate purpose concerns the enclosed doodle...As you can see, it's nothing more than three bits of Idiot Cord braided together. The only trick is in the thickness and length of the cord: 3 sts wide, 6" long. Can I sell this design? I think I can successfully describe the manufacture of a 3-st cord without seriously quoting you, but is Idiot Cord your invention? Please advise.³⁸⁹

Elizabeth had introduced Idiot Cord in her 1971 book, *Knitting Without Tears*,³⁹⁰ later shortening the unfortunate name to I-Cord in her 1981 *Knitting Workshop*, and had used it extensively as cording and as edge finishing treatment in many of her designs. Yet while she had brought the technique to American knitter's attention under the name Idiot or I-Cord, she had not invented this method. Many American knitters were to mistakenly credit Elizabeth with the technique while also completely missing the point that a technique could not be subject to copyright. Copyright applied to a discrete finished object such as a specific sweater design. Plagiarism was, (and is) of course, an entirely different subject, based, as it were, in ethics rather than law. If Carlson had wanted to credit Elizabeth for the three stitch cord which she made famous among Americans, she could have simply quoted and credited Elizabeth's directions, but there could be no sense

³⁸⁹ Linda Carlson to Elizabeth Zimmermann. N.d., Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, Wisconsin.

in which Elizabeth should receive credit for inventing I-Cord. Carlson's query to Elizabeth was typical in this matter in attempting to deal fairly among designers despite confusion. Yet other instances caused consternation and outrage as clearly unfair.

One notable example is relayed in a late eighties letter to Elizabeth from a woman who had taken a class at the national convention of the Knitter's Guild of America. She wrote to Elizabeth to inform her of an instructor who had taught "finishing techniques" for garments but which were "mostly" from Elizabeth's books:

She had us copy them longhand rather than (sic) have them as a handout. Can you think of a good reason for doing this? The other women in my section and I (10 in all) paid out \$500 for our workshop. I think for that we should have had quality instruction like you, rather than someone who kept saying 'Elizabeth Zimmermann says...' She relied on your books a great deal.³⁹¹

Perhaps the instructor felt that the hand copying of the material exempted her in some way and, perhaps, confusing plagiarism with copyright infringement, saw nothing wrong (or ironic) in pocketing \$5000 (minus KGA percentage) in teaching fees for a typically three- or four-day workshop while using Elizabeth's intellectual materials. To be fair, this limited peek into the incident could have a number of interpretations but that is rather the point. Confusion over appropriate credit for intellectual ownership predominated. Even if the instructor was correct in her handling of the materials, the letter writer felt Zimmermann had been significantly and financially slighted. This confusion in teaching was paralleled by confusion in the sale and publication of designs.

Several of Elizabeth's best known designs were subject to copyright infringement due to the disconnect between Elizabeth's structural innovations and the standard

³⁹¹ Merry Klawitter to Elizabeth Zimmermann, N.d., Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

industry understanding of a specific and discrete design. In her early newsletters, Elizabeth took advantage of this disconnect to both sell a design commercially and to self-publish in her newsletter without infringement. The original seamless yoke and the original Norwegian drop shoulder sweaters were cases in point. The industry's desire for, and purchase of, an absolutely specific sweater, with absolutely specific directions, left Elizabeth and other designers free to duplicate structures and techniques in new colors, new textures and with new details as 'new designs'. But Elizabeth was not pleased when her followers (or editorial boards) made seemingly similar distinctions. Two cases are included in the archival record, the "Big Collar Vest" in an unknown publication, and a "cable yoked sweater" in the Spring 1980 *Ladies Home Journal*. In the case of the Big Collar Vest, the designer claimed copyright prominently on the directions and line drawing schematics. This vest, an adult sized, garter stitch sleeveless vest knit in one piece, bears a remarkable resemblance to Elizabeth's Tomten Jacket, originally described in her Fall 1961 *Newsletter # 7*, in *Knitting without Tears* (1971) and again in *Knitting Workshop* (1981) with a very similar schematic drawing. The Big Collar Vest is the Tomten minus sleeves, with the addition of a shawl collar, and with the further addition of Elizabeth's own 'phoney seam' technique for adding stability in circular knit garments, described in her *Newsletter # 16* (Spring 1966), *Knitting Without Tears*, and later publications. No mention is made of Elizabeth's contribution in the copy or drawings. Elizabeth's response in the scrapbook clipping was to circle the copyright notice, draw an arrow and place a large exclamation point "!" by hand.³⁹² The

³⁹² "Big Collar Vest" clipping, Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

modifications of her design, plus the use of her own phoney seams technique, and the similarity to her own schematic, with no crediting nods towards Elizabeth, must have been galling.

A similar situation occurred in the *Ladies' Home Journal Needlecraft* of Spring and Summer 1980 with the publication of a “cable yoked sweater,” with design credit going to a designer who was later to become famous in her own right. A clipping of the publication was sent to Elizabeth with a third party request for help in puzzling out the directions for this “most confusing version of your percentage sweater.”³⁹³ The design, a circular knit, seamless yoke sweater, was very close to Elizabeth’s original yoke sweater design but used a texture stitch, instead of color patterning in the yoke. The designer also outlines a version of Elizabeth’s Percentage System of customizing fit based on basic body measurement as percentages of each other. No credit to Elizabeth was offered in the copy and Elizabeth’s response, again handwritten on the scrapbook page, was:

“WELL!!...a perfectly ordinary seamless yoke sweater” (underlining doubled and emphasis in heavy black marker with subsequent text in pencil).³⁹⁴ Again, the publication under another designer of a lightly modified Elizabeth design, coupled with the uncredited use of one of her signature techniques, left Elizabeth somewhat outraged over the amorphous issue of intellectual ownership and credit.

This situation of confusion can be viewed as one result of Elizabeth’s more democratic understanding of knitting as craftsmanship. The process of professionalization pursued by the American Craft Council, with its clearer boundaries of accreditation and

³⁹³ “Jackie” Letter to Elizabeth Zimmermann, n.d., Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

knowledge, and its hierarchy of status, was one method of assigning value to innovators. Elizabeth herself, outraged over what seemed to be design poaching to her in the above examples, had mixed feelings, and behaviors, about the advantages and disadvantages of those clear boundaries. This is made clear in several instances. In in her unpublished manuscript (rejected by Elinor Parker of Scribner's as a first draft of *Knitter's Almanac*.) Elizabeth delineates an instance in which her desire for recognition conflicted with her ideal of the freedom of knowledge. In her entry for "Monday, June 28th" 1971, Elizabeth discusses her design known as the Sideways Sock. Designed to simplify vertical color striping down the leg, the sock took a great deal of experimentation and prototype knitting which occurred "just at the time of the troubles for our Wisconsin Senator the Right Honourable Joseph McCarthy, and all the mothers in the block would meet at Lucy's house (she had the best television) everyday as soon as the children were packed off to school. Most of us brought handwork of some kind...I worked on my sideways sock."³⁹⁵ After completion, Elizabeth, "having wild thoughts of having it patented," investigated the issue and found "a version of it already existed, originating in Canada about thirty years ago," and, considering her version "much simpler," sold the design to "*Woman's Day* for one of their Christmas Gift issues."³⁹⁶ In her continuing discussion of the sock's particulars in the next entry, Elizabeth offers credit for the original invisible cast-on technique to Mary Thomas and to Barbara Walker for clarity in describing the process. Elizabeth claimed a minor modification on Walker's technique and wrote:

³⁹⁵ Elizabeth Zimmermann, "Lost Document: Monday, June 28th" unpublished manuscript. 1971. 236-7 Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, Wisconsin. The quote goes on to comment that Elizabeth had ever since those days pictured McCarthy in her sideways socks but "this is quite subjective; don't let it hold you back from trying them."

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 236.

I can hardly imagine that Barbara can be modified, but you never know, and this free exchange of ideas between us is something wonderful. As she says ... 'one rare and wonderful aspect of the knitting field is the general free sharing of ideas among knitters' and she is right; I should be ashamed of myself that I ever thought of patenting the Sideways Sock; it's a mercy I wasn't able to.³⁹⁷

Though decidedly coming down onto the side of 'free sharing', Elizabeth was yet careful in this passage to credit both Mary Thomas and Barbara Walker for their contributions (though not the original Canadian sock designer). Elizabeth clearly desired to purge the anonymity of innovative knitters with actual history in design, though she was aware of the difficulties in this effort.

Her attempt, despite the difficulties, to find a clear line between crediting the past and claiming her own originality can be seen in her use of the term "unvention". Though Elizabeth freely used the term "invention" for her work throughout the early Newsletters (1957- 1969) by the end of that period, she was more cautious in her claims to originality. Her 1971 book, *Knitting Without Tears*, began to make clear her qualms over 'invention' in the description of her sewn cast-off method:

'Casting-on casting-off' has just sprung into being, fully fledged. Although I will claim invention of this technique, I will not claim its original invention. Someone else may have thought of it, and forgotten it again. All I assert is that I have never seen it or heard of it before.³⁹⁸

This caveat to 'invention' would be used several more times until the publication of her second book, *Knitters Almanac*, in 1974. On the very first page Elizabeth used the term "unvent" to describe her technical innovations and explained her thinking in the July Shawl section 75 pages later. Feeling that the term "invention" smacked of "a clean white

³⁹⁷ Ibid., "Tuesday June 29th" 238.

³⁹⁸ Elizabeth Zimmermann, *Knitting Without Tears*, (New York: Scribners' 1971) 3.

coat...a workshop full of tomes of reference” and “charts like sales charts and graphs like the economy” and a “bevy of hand-knitters in the backroom, tirelessly toiling” at the actual work of her knitting, Elizabeth cried “Rubbish.”³⁹⁹

But unvented---ahh! One un-vents something; one unearths it; one digs it up, one runs it down in whatever recesses of the eternal consciousness it has gone to ground. I very much doubt if anything is really new when one works in the prehistoric medium of wool with needles. ...In knitting there are ancient possibilities; the earth is enriched with the dust of the millions of knitters who have held wool and needles since the beginning of sheep. Seamless sweaters and one-row buttonholes; knitted hems and phoney seams—it is unthinkable that these have, in mankind’s history, remained undiscovered and unknitted.⁴⁰⁰

Elizabeth’s sense of the history of actual domestically embedded knitters, even if anonymous, as worthy of a kind of homage is significant in the context of intellectual ownership. She wished herself to be remembered, and she wished to honor those other knitters, past and contemporary, who did innovative work, even outside the parody of professionalism she described as a ‘workshop full of tomes of reference’ and ‘a clean white coat’. The term ‘unvention’ became, for her, a working though imperfect resolution to that issue in a previously anonymous tradition.

Her clearest statement on this issue of intellectual ownership issue with regard to her ‘unventions’ came in correspondence with the knitting writer Montse Stanley, in response to her letter of April 5, 1988, regarding her forthcoming book *The Handknitter’s Handbook*. Stanley expressed private gratitude to Elizabeth for “a number of things which no doubt, you would find very familiar even if they are given new names...and also to ask your forgiveness for not giving you specific credits” since so many would require

³⁹⁹ Elizabeth Zimmermann, *Knitter’s Almanac*, (New York: Dover, 1978) 75.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

thanks, and so few are known by name. Elizabeth's response was to disclaim any claim to the I-cord technique which Stanley mentioned but made clear her genuine claims to her designs:

“For my genuine Unventions such as the NALGAR yoke, the TOMTEN Jacket, the 1&3 sweater, the Snail Hat, the Surprise Jacket, the Hand-to-Hand, the Suspender Sweater, the Pi Shawl, the Rib-warmer, (etc, etc,; my word; what a list) we do like to receive a modest drop of INK if convenient. And of course when we find our ideas spread around in knitting ‘instructions’ we are more gratified then (sic) not, as is shews (sic) that they are penetrating the knitting consciousness, which to our minds is the ultimate in usefulness.”⁴⁰¹

Elizabeth's slippage into the third person plural (and royal) ‘we’ does rather lead to a fairly cold reading of her response to Stanley's private recognition of her contributions, yet it is also clear that she had little choice in the matter and would take comfort where she could from her growing influence, even among British knitting writers. Stanley did go on to mention Elizabeth by name in later editions, and the term ‘unvention,’ as her justification in not offering more credit than “THANK YOU to ALL KNITTERS, past and present, who have made the craft grow through their work, their writings, or their quiet dedication.”⁴⁰² Stanley also included Elizabeth's *Knitting without Tears* in her listing of recommended publications.

These tensions around the correct assignment of economic and social capital among the new independent knitters was to remain unresolved in the minds of many, and even among the most professional of designers and writers. The depth and breadth of confusion in ownership between private knitting use, formal and informal teaching

⁴⁰¹ Correspondence between Montse Stanley and Elizabeth Zimmermann, April 4 and 15, 1986. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

⁴⁰² Montse Stanley, *The Handknitter's Handbook* (Newton Abbott: David and Charles Publishers, 1986, 1987). 8.

materials and environments , and the selling of garments, designs, and publications was to remain problematic well beyond Elizabeth's lifetime.

One of the clearest public and institutional examples of this continuing and confusing situation can be read in the pages of *Knitter's Magazine* between the Winter 1987 and the Fall 1989 issues. A combination of letters to the editors, and a formal editorially sanctioned set of opinions generated a discussion regarding intellectual ownership between both community newcomers and longtime knitters and designers which lingered across eight issues and two full years. The discussion opened in the letters to the editor section with a query from Astrid Phillips requesting information regarding copyright for designers.⁴⁰³ The succeeding issue also carried a comment regarding patents in the letters section. Bee Borssuck wrote that Lee Gilchrist's book had a notice of Patent Pending, and that "The Patent Office *has*, in its ignorance of needlework, granted patents for *stitches*" though it later rescinded them as "the result of movements of the hands is not patentable."⁴⁰⁴ The magazine formally took up the discussion in the Summer 1988 issue with a new discussion forum feature with a first topic of "Copyright—when is it wrong to copy?" with responses to Phillip's original letter by Norma Ellman (chair of Network, an association of professional designers) and by Marcia Steward, who is "not a lawyer" but has "some direct experience with copyrights and patents as they pertain to garments."⁴⁰⁵ Ellman makes the point that sales are the point of contention but she makes no real differentiation between original work, derivative work or transformational in learning from other designers though she noted that keeping it all straight is an editorial

⁴⁰³ *Knitters*, Winter 1987. 2.

⁴⁰⁴ *Knitters*, Spring 1988. 41.

⁴⁰⁵ "Forum: Copyright—when is it wrong to copy?" *Knitters*, Spring 1988. 17.

“nightmare.”⁴⁰⁶ Steward pointed out that historical work is often in the public domain, that copyright pertained to a specific and individual design, and that consultation with an arts lawyer would be the best option. Both focused on the ethical aspects of copyright and encouraged originality without ever addressing the root of the issue regarding derivative or transformational use of an original.

A letter to the editor in the Winter 1988 issue by Mariah McCreanor attempted again to get at that very point. She admitted that she was “new to the business of selling handknit garments” and asked for copyright information on changing designs by “color and stitch pattern” while retaining the “mechanics of making it” or “structure” of the original design.⁴⁰⁷ Her query was very specific: what changes are necessary to an original design to prevent copyright infringement? This is exactly the question that Elizabeth had over the ‘big collar shawl’ publication, and many others. This letter prompted a further edition of the “Forum: Give me a Break!” in the Spring 1989 issue with opinions by Mary Righetti and Meg Swansen. Righetti weighed in that only “exact and precise expression of an original idea” could be copyrighted, and implied that any change was acceptable. Swansen took a different tack and, ignoring the question of financial value, instead addressed the issue of historical continuity and the need to know our ancestors. It is here that Meg remarks on the Pretzel Sweater’s anonymous popularity. Meg related several instances in which her attempts to offer credit were editorially stripped from her publications though she recognized that “to give full credit, there would be a reference or footnote after practically every stitch.”⁴⁰⁸ Confusion was clearly rampant.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ “Letters from readers” *Knitters*, Winter 1988, 4.

⁴⁰⁸ “Forum: Give me a Break!” *Knitters*, Spring 1989, 62.

The editors attempted to put the topic to rest in the Summer 1989 “Forum: Free-lance, first publication, and next topic” with Mary McGovern, and a return by Astrid Phillips. McGovern laid clear the industry standard of design sales which reverted all rights to the publication, and made a distinction between writers and designers with regard to the rights to their work. She further expressed her awareness that publications were purposed to drive yarn sales, not encourage the “integrity of the craft” and that piracy in knitting was a serious problem.⁴⁰⁹ Astrid Phillips, though grateful for the attention, was still wondering just what changes are allowable. Letters to the editor were numerous on the topic with four out of seven letters addressing the issue. A letter by Karen Germano made perhaps the most reasonable point when she said that “the line of distinction between public domain and a designer’s own technique is as fuzzy as any decent moral dilemma” and that credit should be offered at every opportunity.⁴¹⁰ The editors attempted to close the discussion with “This seems a perfect time to close (or perhaps just table) this discussion. New Business?”⁴¹¹ This did not actually end the discussion as a letter to the editor in the very next issue (Fall 1989) by the original “Forum” writer, Norma Ellman, completely contested Mary McGovern’s understanding of the writer/designer distinction and celebrated a Supreme Court decision that “struck down” the “confiscatory ‘work for hire’ contract with free-lance professionals” which created a blanket assignation of ‘all rights to the purchaser’”.⁴¹² Despite the amount of

⁴⁰⁹ Mary McGovern, “Forum-Free Lance, first publication, and next topic.” *Knitters*, Summer 1989, 33.

⁴¹⁰ Karen Germano, “Letters” *Knitters* Summer 1989, 4.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., Forum, 33.

⁴¹² Norma Ellman “Letters from Readers” *Knitters*, Fall 1989, 3.

ink and emotion spilled, still, little real guidance could be gleaned from the discussion regarding the issue of the practical continuum between originality and transformation.

What was clear, and remained so, throughout those first 19 issues of *Knitter's* was the depth of gratitude to Elizabeth for her work in design and innovation, and her encouragement to freedom in self-expression and design. Numerous articles, advertisements and letter after letter mention her work, her designs, and her techniques as deeply and intimately instrumental in the work and lives of the readers, writers and knitters of these new communities. Karen Germano was speaking for multitudes in her letter in that Summer 1989 issue:

While reading your 'Forum' column in Issue 14, I was touched ...If Elizabeth Zimmermann and Meg, herself, did not exist, I can say with certainty that I would not be a knitter...My interest and love of knitting sprang directly from the pages of *Knitting Without Tears*, and progressed through *Knitters Almanac* (my personal favorite), *Knitting Workshop*, (with videos), *The Knitting Glossary* videos, to *Wool Gatherings*. You get the idea. My sweaters are their sweaters—sometimes *exactly* their sweaters but usually a combination of their techniques and ideas....Credit for this design, this technique, this *knitter* goes to Elizabeth Zimmermann.⁴¹³

Despite confusion over who should get the money, there was little confusion over Elizabeth's status. By the time of her retirement from public life in 1989, Elizabeth's dream of a community of knitters, engaged in all sorts of argle-bargle, but creative and enormously productive nonetheless, was a reality. Her Knitting Camp, begun in 1974, continues to this day with waiting lists for attendance, and has had only one interruption. In 1989, Elizabeth's family felt her slipping away from them into increasing mental confusion and they canceled the camp in order to have time to capture more of

⁴¹³ Karen Germano, "Letters from Readers" *Knitters*, Summer 1989, 4.

Elizabeth's memories and stories. This effort resulted in her fourth book, *Knitting Around* by Elizabeth Zimmermann, a combination memoir and knitting book which featured over 25 projects and published, for the first time, a variety of Elizabeth's watercolors. The note sent out to campers early in that year expressed Elizabeth's deep pleasure at the "spreading and the acceptance of my knitting theories throughout the country" and how "looking at these rewarding evolvments happily and gratefully, it becomes much easier for me to ask you all for your blessing as I say farewell to you. My most heartfelt wishes and thoughts are with you---always. Good Knitting."⁴¹⁴ Elizabeth ended her life-long dialogue with knitters as she did all her original *Newsletters*.

Elizabeth's death on November 30, 1999, was announced to friends a few days later and within a short time Meg Swansen was contacted for interviews by the *New York Times*, National Public Radio, and the Canadian Broadcast Corporation. The *New York Times* obituary was published on December 12, and

...was subsequently picked up by scores of newspapers around the US, which inspired follow-up editorials and letters-to-the-editor. ... We had thought that we were fully aware of Elizabeth's popularity among knitters. Her books and video sales, plus the frequent and generous acknowledgements of her influence by many other designers and magazines bespoke a wide array of followers. But we far underestimated the depth and breadth of her impact upon the knitting world... we remain a bit stunned by the realization that our wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother was also a Knitting Mother to such a vast number of people.⁴¹⁵

Of course, Elizabeth's long dialogue with American knitters continues to the present, in many forms and with infinite expressions. Her books remain in print and Schoolhouse

⁴¹⁴ Elizabeth Zimmermann, typescript note, dated January 1989. Schoolhouse Press Archives, Pittsville, WI.

⁴¹⁵ Meg Swansen, *Wool Gathering* #62, March 2000, 1.

Press continues to discover new designs of hers in her notes and design books. Her interest group on Ravelry, the knitters' social media site, remains extremely popular, ranked 31st out of over 34,000 groups.⁴¹⁶

A recent (2016) mystery knit-along invitation by Stephen West makes a perfect example of Elizabeth's enduring legacy of innovation and freedom of expression. A knit-along is a community of knitters all working on the same or very similar project. A mystery knit-along is led by a designer who pieces out directions weekly without any hint of the actual finished object. Hugely popular among the online knitting communities, it is a common way for designers to achieve recognition and individual knitters to participate in communal activities. Stephen West, in partnership with Kyli Kleven and Steve May, produced a music video invitation, "Baby You're a Knitter!" set to the tune of Katy Perry's *Firework*. In it, the adult Stephen West, dressed in a red polka-dotted onesie, dances around the streets and bridges of Amsterdam, in and out of the West Knits yarn shop, rolling on skeins of yarn and unfinished projects, singing, and waving skeins overhead. This campy and outrageous video, full of self-expressive and gender-bending millennial references also advocates the use of high quality wool yarns and seamless knitting. And there is Elizabeth, as Stephen West sings and waves both *Knitters*

Workshop and the second edition of *Knitters Almanac*:

like Lizzie Zimmermann, you must look within. Grab a glass of gin. You just gotta cast on, be strong, join my Knit Along. Grab your needles and balls. It's a free-for-all!" ... 'Cause Baby, You're a knitter, all over Ravelry and Twitter. Just make your needles knit, knit, purl; throw in a yarn over and watch out, girl!⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶ Ravelry.com, accessed 12.11.2015.

⁴¹⁷ Stephen West, "Baby You're a Knitter" WestKnits Mystery Knit Along Invitation, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwmfP0PNOLg>.

In this most contemporary campy, online, Katy Perry parody of knitterly culture, Elizabeth is there. It is arguable that her work for individuality and self-expression, for knitting as a form of craftsmanship, and exploration and innovation as an identity, in the mid- and late-twentieth century, from an old converted schoolhouse in the wilds of Wisconsin, made him possible. It is certainly clear that Stephen West is happily taking Elizabeth with him, well into the new millennium, and into the lives of many more generations of knitters.

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Notes on Primary Sources

This dissertation is built on a foundation of primary sources that are not readily available publically in either libraries or archives, but are crucial for understanding the interplay of knitting practice in cultural production and reproduction. Though I have cited all sources in the notes to each chapter, it is important to understand the issues of access and representation in working with hard to find sources. It is, of course, a circular argument: inaccessible sources discourage research into topics; lack of research interest shifts archival resources into other topics. Yet this topic of knitting offers a strong example of individuals wresting control of their practices and philosophies out of the hands of commercial entities, and initiating new forms of self-representation and autonomy, and doing so in a milieu which is so easily assumed to be conservative and traditional with regard to gender roles and cultural production.

In establishing the state of mid-century knitting, and in tracing the trajectory of change, I focused on periodical and book publication. While many of the general women's magazines carried occasional information on knitting, the most comprehensive material on technique and practice was to be found in the specialty publications, either supplementary to the main publication, or as a separate publication. Thus *Woman's Day* and *McCall's* would carry occasional knitting features but the primary avenue for the

reproduction of knitting culture was on display in their secondary publications, as noted in the text. Very few of these secondary publications or of the specialty knitting periodicals, such as *Vogue Knitting Book* (both the earlier Conde Nast publication and the later revival by Soho Publishing), *Knitters*, and *The Workbasket* were collected in either libraries or archives. In seeking a strong representation of various classes of American knitters, I was forced to generate a private collection of several publications that cover several decades and include Canadian versions of the publications. Book publication in this period is similarly problematic. The important earlier knitting books of Barbara Abbey, Ida Riley Duncan, Virginia Woods-Bellamy, Carol Curtis/Marguerite Maddox, and Betty Cornell are rarely retained in library collections, and are only occasionally available through private sales. The private collection of materials at Schoolhouse Press were instrumental in identifying significant titles and authors in book publication, either through mention in the letters, or appearing in the advertisement pages of the periodicals.

If the hunt for representations of the American mid-century knitter were problematic, the discovery of the depth and breadth of the collection of Elizabeth Zimmermann papers at Schoolhouse Press was paradise for the knitting scholar. The family of Elizabeth's daughter, Meg Swanson, and her son, Cully Swanson, were extraordinarily generous in granting access to what is still one of the cornerstones of their business. The collection of business records, unpublished manuscripts, family memoirs, teaching notes, Study Guide drafts, correspondence series, fan mail, newspaper and magazine clippings, personal notes, and exhibition records is extensive and was the ideal lens through which to examine not only the extraordinary individual of Elizabeth, but also the interior workings of relationships between designers and publishers, the issues

around intellectual ownership in design, the outreach to new knitting audiences outside of the standard industry publications, and the reflections on personal liberation expressed by knitters in their first encounter with original craftsmanship. My dissertation has only lightly touched on a few of the multiple avenues of research which could be opened by access to this collection.

The professional archive of the Milwaukee Art Museum, and the Smithsonian Archive of American Art, was of substantial use in excavating the trajectory of identity in professional craftsmanship amidst the papers of the Wisconsin Designer Craftsman organization. Their well-organized collection of exhibition brochures, jurors' statements, membership records, and changes in organizational structure and membership requirements was instrumental in parsing what Sandra Alfoldy identified as the growing urgency in distancing the professional craftsman from domestic production and 'women's work' in the rapidly shifting ground of craft.

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Whittaker, J.C. *American Flintknappers: Stone Age Art in the Age of Computers*. University of Texas Press, 2013.

VITA

VITA

M. Lilly Marsh
Curriculum Vitae

Current Position

Lilly Marsh Studios, Glens Falls, New York
Studio arts in Weaving, Dyeing and Knitting, Instruction and Production
Adirondack Folk School, Lake Luzerne, New York
Occasional Instructor in Textiles

Education

- Ph.D. American Studies, Purdue University, Summer 2016
West Lafayette, IN
Dissertation: "Knitting Rebellion: Elizabeth Zimmermann, Identity and Craftsmanship in Post War America"
Committee Chair: Susan Curtis, American Studies/History, Purdue
Shannon McMullen, AmSt/ Art and Design, Purdue
Nancy Gabin, AmSt/History, Purdue
Darren Dochuk, History, Notre Dame
- M. A. English, Purdue University, 1985
West Lafayette, IN
- B.A. English, Purdue University, 1982
West Lafayette, IN

Areas of Specialization

Research: Mid and later 20th Century American Textile Craft History and Practice, 20th Century American Social and Cultural History and Women's History, Critical Pedagogy for Craft History, Theory and Practice

Practice: knit wire sculptural constructions, multi-harness complex weaving, shibori and painted warp techniques, fiber reactive and acid dyeing, functional traditional knitting

Manuscripts in Progress

Marsh, Lilly. "Knitting Rebellion: Elizabeth Zimmermann and the Cultural Production of Identity in Post War North American Knitting" *Stitching the Self: Exploring the Power of the Needle*, Johanna Amos and Lisa Binkely, eds. Bloomsbury Academic, proposed for Spring/Summer 2017

Awards, Honors, and Achievements

2016	American Studies Nominee for Distinguished Dissertation Award, College of Liberal Arts, Purdue University
2016-2015	Bilsland 12 Month Dissertation Fellowship, Purdue University Graduate School, AY2015-2016
2015	The Teaching Academy Graduate Teaching Award, Purdue University
2014-2013	Purdue Research Foundation 12 Month Research Grant
2013-2009	4 Year Lynn Fellowship, Purdue University Graduate School
2012	"Treasure House of Knowledge" sculptural commission for American Studies Graduate Student Association
2012	Craft Research Fund Graduate Research Award for Dissertation Research, Center for Craft Creativity and Design, Hendersonville, North Carolina
2012-2009	Purdue Research Foundation Summer Research Grants,
2010	Chester E. Eisinger Research Award, American Studies, Purdue University
2008	Indiana Artisan Designate for Excellence in Textiles, Indiana State Artisan Project, Indianapolis, Indiana
2008	"Five Silk and Copper Panels", Permanent Collection purchase of the Office of the Dean of Engineering, Purdue University,
2007	Indiana Arts Commission Individual Artist Project Grant FY2007, for study at AVL Looms in Chico CA
2006	Two Vessels and "7 Offerings", Permanent Collection purchase of Ivy-Tech Community College, Lafayette Indiana
2004	Indiana Arts Commission Individual Artist Project Grant FY2004, for website development and photography
2003	Penland School for Crafts, Studio Assistantship to Edwina Bringle, Weaving Studio, Penland North Carolina
2002	Merle K. Gable, II, Memorial Grant, North Shore Weavers Guild, administered through Handweaver's Guild of America, Suwannee, Georgia

Conference Presentations

2015 Universities Art Association of Canada, "Stitching the Self: Exploring the Power of the Needle: Becoming the Boss of Your Knitting: Elizabeth Zimmermann and the movement from Domesticity to Craft Artisanhip". Halifax, Nova Scotia CA, November 5-7

- 2015 American Studies Association, “Pedagogical Practice in Interdisciplinary Research: Craft Practice as Research Platform in American Studies”, Toronto, Ontario CA, October 8-11
- 2014 Boston University Art Gallery, “Reconsidering Craft: Hand Knitting in America 1955- 1990, Elizabeth Zimmermann and the shifting Discourse of Identity from Domesticity to Craft Artisanhip”. Graduate Symposium, Boston, MA November 14
- 2014 Cultural Studies Association, “Ecologies of Creativity: Historical Shifts in Hand Knitting towards Mass Artisanhip Cultural Production,” a 90 minute praxis session, Salt Lake City, UT, May 29-31
 “Maker Space 2014” exhibition of knit wire and silk paper constructions, Cultural Studies Association Annual Conference, Salt Lake City UY, May 29-31
- 2014 Southwest Popular and American Culture Association, “First it was for love, then it was for money: American Hand knitting from Social Practice to Business Venture, 1955-2011,” Albuquerque, NM, February 18-22

Teaching Experience

- AY 2014-15 American Studies “Imagining America: Craft as Cultural Work in the 20th Century US”, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN
Designed and was sole instructor of 3 credit hour 1 semester course; developed readings, assignments, rubrics and syllabus, supervised student craft practice and research; evaluated presentations and written work for 10-15 students
- 2013-2010 Introduction to Freshman Composition (6 semesters), English Department Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN
Instructor of record for 4 hour credit/5 day week 1 semester course (20 students), designed syllabi, developed lesson plan and assignments, full classroom management responsibility for traditional and digital composition in English with native and non-native speakers
- 2008 No More than Four: Innovations in Four Harness Weaving, Textiles Department, Indianapolis Art Center Indianapolis, IN
Designed and instructed an 8 week 4-harness weaving course for intermediate level and higher, including pre and post loom dye techniques, supplemental weft techniques and Thea Moorman supplemental warp methods; procured and organized materials kits, followed and taught dye safety procedures, developed handouts and assignments, and organized final student exhibition

Campus Presentations

- 2013 2 Session Guest Workshop “Algorithmic Knitting” for AD616 “Graduate Seminar in ETB: Fashion, Technology and Culture” with Pr. S. McMullen, September,

- 2013 Purdue University American Studies Graduate Symposium, Presented “Local Community Initiatives in the Greater Lafayette Area with Some Reflections on the 2012 American Studies Garden: Food for Thought, Food for the Food Pantry,” April,
- 2011 Purdue University American Studies Graduate Symposium, Presented “Restoring Voices to the Silent: The Creveling Collection of Handwoven Materials at the Indiana State Museum: Four Generations of Creative Women and their Communities under the name of T.C. Steele,” April,
- 2010 Purdue University American Studies Graduate Symposium, Presented artwork and paper entitled “Coins for the Boatmen: An Artist’s Interpretation of Magical Thinking in Haitian Earth Quake Relief Efforts,” April

Selected Exhibitions and Competitions

- 2016 “Meet up at the Library: Creative Reflections on Research Practice”, West Lafayette Public Library, West Lafayette, IN, February-March
- 2014 “Nesting Containers” 20th Anniversary Invitational Exhibition, Prairie Arts Council, Rensselaer IN, August-Oct
- 2008 “Selected Indiana Artisans”, Lillian Fendig Gallery, Rensselaer IN, August
- 2008 “Wire Vessels: a Shimmering Surface”, Craftsman House Gallery, St. Petersburg FL, June 25-July 7
- 2007 “Lilly Marsh: A Shimmering Surface”, South Shore Arts, Munster IN, October 26-Nov 25,
- 2007 “The Shimmering Surface: Small Works by Lilly Marsh”, Indianapolis Art Center, Indianapolis IN, Sept 7-Oct 31,
- 2006 “Plays well with Others: Collaborative Work by Lisa Walsh and Lilly Marsh”, Tippecanoe Arts Federation, Lafayette IN Dec 1-22,
- 2006 “Fiber Arts Convergence”, Grand Gallery Creative, Grand Rapids MI, June 19-July 8,
- 2005 “The Creative Impulse: Indiana Women Artists”, Minnetrista Center, Muncie IN, March 19-May1,
- 2005 “New Fiber: Lilly Marsh, Marci Rae McDade, Lindsay Obermeyer, Bonnie Zimmer” Indianapolis Art Center, Indianapolis IN, March 11-April 24,
- 2005 “52nd Annual Mid-States Art Exhibition”, Evansville Museum of Arts, History and Science, Evansville IN, Dec 19-2005- Jan 30,
- 2004 “Pallbearers: an Installation of Wire in Textile Techniques”, Tippecanoe Arts Federation, Lafayette IN, July 9- July 31,
- 2002 “Wired and Woven: Lilly Marsh Work in Fiber Metal”, Port Moody Art Center, Port Moody, British Columbia CA, July 23- Aug 11,
- 2002 “Wired and Woven: Lilly Marsh New Work”, Tippecanoe Arts Federation, Lafayette IN, Jan 11-Feb 10,
- 2001 “Regional Exhibition”, Indiana University-Kokomo Gallery, Kokomo IN Sept 30-Nov 11,
- 2001 “Small Expressions 2001”, Handweaver’s Guild of America at St. Louis Artist’s Guild at Oak Knoll, St Louis MO, June 8-July 21,

- 2000 “Indiana NOW”, Greater Lafayette Museum of Art, Lafayette IN, Jan19-Feb 25,
 2001 “Our Planet, Ourselves”, St Louis Artist’s Guild at Oak Knoll, St Louis MO, June
 18-July29,

Department Service

- 2015 American Studies Teaching Assistant Support Group, Spring Semester
Organized and convened first American Studies Graduate Teaching Support Group
- 2015 Knitting University Installation, American Studies, College of Liberal Arts
 Purdue University Spring Fest
Designed and developed community participation Craftivism installation for Department representation at University wide community event, developed materials and flyers, enlisted student volunteers and oversaw installation, activity and take down.
- 2014 Librarian/Historian, American Studies Graduate Student Organization
Researched, procured software, and compiled first digitally searchable database of Graduate Student Library
- 2013 Member of Purdue American Studies Graduate Student Symposium Committee,
 2012 Member, Purdue American Studies Graduate Student Recruitment Committee

Community Engagement

- 2016 Board Member (3 year term), Center for Knit and Crochet, a non-profit digital museum dedicated to the education of museum professionals about knitting and crochet, and to the preservation of the material culture of knitting and crochet.
Tasked with the organization and staging of an academic symposium regarding scholarship concerned with traditional needle arts.
www.centerforknitandcrochet.org
- 2016 “Meet up at the Library: Creative Reflections on Research Practice,” West Lafayette Public Library, West Lafayette, IN
Created six original knit wire objects with participatory element in conversation with West Lafayette Public Library patrons, including artist’s demonstration of techniques, and closing gallery talk “Making Things, Making Identity” and generated final collaborative (artist & library patron) display
- 2013-12 Director and Head Gardener, American Studies Garden
 Purdue Village Community Gardens, Purdue University
 West Lafayette, IN
Secured grant funding through University Office of Engagement for Community Service Projects; organized materials and schedules, instructed new gardeners and donated over 500 lbs. fresh produce to the St. Johns Food Pantry, Lafayette, IN
- 2012 Guest Lecturer, Wabash Area Lifetime Learning Association, “Following Threads: 3 Communities of Handweavers in the 20th Century”
 West Lafayette, IN, April 12

- 2011 Community Service Student Grant for Archival Work at West Lafayette Public Library Local History Project, Purdue University, Spring Semester

Additional Professional Service

- 2008- 2002 President, Vice President, Officer and Member, Artists' Own, Inc. a Co-operative Juried Art Gallery, Lafayette, IN
Worked collaboratively with 17-26 other owner members in scheduling retail and service work hours, making, communicating and implementing policy decisions, liaising with local government, non-profit arts organizations, and local merchants associations over community events and calendars, oversaw major re-write and implementation of organizational structure for professional gallery,
- 2004 Reader/Juror for Area IV Arts Organization Support Grants, Tippecanoe Arts Federation for Indiana Arts Commission

Society Memberships

American Studies Association
 Cultural Studies Association
 College Art Association
 The Costume Society of America
 Organization of American Historians
 Indiana State Artisan Program
 Handweaver's Guild of America